

PRESSING ON/TAKING FLIGHT
HEBREWS 11
WEEK 20

In Hebrews 11 we read the author's call to live by faith – to patiently endure. The author is going to give us a line-up of those who patiently endured. This “line-up” – OT saints who exercised FAITH. The JUST shall live by FAITH – Hab. 2:4. There's no other way. Salvation is the same – in the OT and in the NT: by grace through faith in God's revealed message. That message always points to Jesus!

As there were no chapters in the author's epistle to the readers, let's begin w/. . . .
Hebrews 10:34b-39

*knowing that you have a better and an enduring possession for yourselves in heaven.^{[i] 35}
Therefore do not cast away your confidence, which has great reward.³⁶ For you have
need of endurance, so that after you have done the will of God, you may receive the
promise:*

³⁷ *“For yet a little while,
And He^[j] who is coming will come and will not tarry.
³⁸ Now the^[k] just shall live by faith;
But if anyone draws back,
My soul has no pleasure in him.”^[l]*

³⁹ *But we are not of those who draw back to perdition, but of those who believe to the
saving of the soul.*

The author then makes the connection between endurance and FAITH.

Hebrews 11:1

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

In this familiar introduction, the author is NOT attempting to define faith. He is showing the connection between faith and patient endurance. The word *substance* means assurance, confidence, certainty. *Substance*, in Greek literature, was used for a title deed. While the deed itself has no value, it is a GUARANTEE of ownership!! In the same way, faith does not establish the reality of what is anticipated. That reality is already decreed by God!

Faith gives us the assurance, the confidence, in what is not yet seen. Faith rests upon God's promises which WILL be delivered because of God's character which proclaims His faithfulness!

It is the OBJECT of our faith that is important, that is VALUABLE!

We are assured, confident, certain and GUARANTEED of those things hoped for. Those things hoped for – ALL that Jesus has provided for us:

- The reality of forgiveness of sin
- The indwelling strength and power of the Holy Spirit
- The peace of God that surpasses understanding
- The armor of God for spiritual battles
- The strength from God to persevere
- The joy of the Lord
- Abundant grace for every need
- In the future a glorified body – no sickness, no disease
- Dwelling with God for eternity
- An imperishable inheritance
- A home where there is no sin or rebellion or sickness or sorrow or death or disease – where the Lamb of God provides all the light you will need forever!

Those things hoped for - the sufficiency we have in Jesus – that the author has been addressing in his letter thus far. We, as believers in Jesus, are living in the REALITY OF JESUS! The substance of “hope” is the triumphant work of Jesus that assures the believer that he will spend eternity in the presence of God.

For us – we who know Jesus personally and have been forgiven – hope is a settled assurance that comes to the child of God who by faith lays hold of the promises of God and claims them for himself.

Hope must have a foundation. The foundation of hope is always that which God has promised – which we know from His Word!

How do you know that this hope is yours?

How have you lived in the day of trial/testing? Faith is a gift of God’s grace and assures you, regardless of the outlook, that all the promises of God to you are “Yea and Amen”! Settled assurance of those promises! In the midst of dark days we may not experience the presence of the Lord. We might wonder if He hears our prayers and knows our cries. Heaven may seem a million ages from us. The enemy’s grip on the world that presses in on us appears to be much more real. That is when faith takes over. Faith is the proof that all the promises of God in Christ are yours – if you are His child – even when you cannot see them.

Based on what is true from a heavenly perspective, we can live victoriously in this earthly realm. The victory that God has already won is ours!

The word *evidence* conveys the idea of conviction – a settled feeling of certainty. This certainty concerns things that as yet are in the future, for they are “not seen”.

What does a faithful enduring person look like?

Hebrews 11 tells us that a faithful enduring person is one who PLEASES God while living in the crucible of trials and afflictions!

Hebrews 11:2-3

² *For by it the elders obtained a good testimony.*

³ *By faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that the things which are seen were not made of things which are visible.*

The author is using the word *elders* as a synonym for the Jewish forefathers. The ancestors of the readers received a promise from God, by faith claimed that promise, and then patiently endured until. . . .

God called the universe into being by speaking the word (Psa. 33:4-11). And, the physical universe was not fashioned of pre-existing matter. It was not “made of things which are visible.” There were no human witnesses present at the time of creation. Therefore, it is necessary for us to place our faith in the Creator’s testimony concerning how the worlds were framed. This is a fact we are called upon to believe. The credibility of the word we are asked to believe concerning creation is based on the Person making the revelation. In the natural realm, something cannot come out of nothing. But the God Whose word we are asked to believe is a God Who could call all that exists into being from nothing. A God of such power is worthy to be believed. This is what the author is driving home to the readers.

Hebrews 11:4

By faith Abel offered to God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, through which he obtained witness that he was righteous, God testifying of his gifts; and through it he being dead still speaks.

People of faith are men and women possessed by a vision of realities not yet experienced. They live in hope that the best is ahead and they keep reaching for it.

One event is singled out in the life of Abel in Hebrews 11 – the sacrifice he brought to God (Gen. 4:2-5).

- Abel was a keeper of sheep; Cain was a tiller of the ground.
- Abel brought an offering of the firstborn of his flock.
- Cain brought an offering of the fruit of the ground.
- The Lord respected Abel and his offering.
- The Lord did not respect Cain and his offering.

WHY?

Traditional view – God taught Adam and Eve that blood sacrifice was required to cover their sins (Gen. 3:21). They passed this on to their children (although the Bible doesn't mention this), and a tradition of blood sacrifice became imbedded in the culture.

Cain's offering was rejected; yet God spoke to Cain and encouraged him. "So the LORD said to Cain, 'Why are you angry? And why has your countenance fallen? ⁷ If you do well, will you not be accepted? And if you do not do well, sin lies at the door. And its desire *is* for you, but you should rule over it.'" (Gen. 4:6-7)

Another view – the issue was not so much the difference between the two offerings as it was a heart issue: faith.

Abel had it; Cain did not.

The Lord's respect was not just for Abel's gift (BUT – it does say in the Genesis passage that God respected Abel's offering and did not respect Cain's offering), but for "Abel and his offering."

Consider: both the knowledge of what God required – a blood sacrifice – accompanied by the right heart condition are in view in this account of Cain and Abel.

Note: Hebrews 12:24 comments about the blood sacrifice of Abel. While the context of Heb. 12:24 teaches that Jesus' blood is better than the blood offering that Abel brought, it does focus on the type of sacrifice Abel offering to the Lord – a blood sacrifice.

Hebrews 11:5-6

⁵ *By faith Enoch was taken away so that he did not see death, "and was not found, because God had taken him"; ^[a] for before he was taken he had this testimony, that he pleased God. ⁶ But without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him.*

By faith Enoch walked in fellowship with God. And his faith produced a righteousness that pleased God. Enoch lived in a corrupt age that was headed for judgment by flood. Enoch did not conform to the standards of the age in which he lived. He walked in accordance with the standards of God's righteousness. The author of Hebrews does not cite a specific instance of Enoch responding to God's voice. The Holy Spirit inspired the author to tell the readers of his epistle – and us - that before Enoch was taken, he had this testimony – that he pleased God. Faith produced a life so pleasing to God that God translated him into His presence without physical death.

The author is stating that the only way one can walk with God so as to PLEASE God is to walk by faith. The word *but* in v. 6 introduces the truth that "without faith it is impossible to please Him." One who pleases God must believe that He exists. One who pleases God is confident of God's love toward him/her. God is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him! *Diligently* – patient endurance.

Hebrews 11:7

By faith Noah, being divinely warned of things not yet seen, moved with godly fear, prepared an ark for the saving of his household, by which he condemned the world and became heir of the righteousness which is according to faith.

Noah believed God even though that which God promised was yet a long way off. Noah's obedience was seen in constructing the ark – over four football fields in length on a dry plain. NO FLOOD waters had ever threatened mankind previously! Noah's obedience was, in essence, passing judgment on his disobedient generation. His obedience condemned their disobedience. Noah's faith in the God Who announced judgment produced righteousness which God imputed to him by faith.

- In the pre-patriarchal period, the faith of Abel was demonstrated through the knowledge of the sacrifice of blood and through recognizing his obligation to the Creator.
- The faith of Enoch was demonstrated through his fellowship with God – walking with God.
- The faith of Noah was manifested through his obedience to God's commands.

Hebrews 11:8-10

By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to the place which he would receive as an inheritance. And he went out, not knowing where he was going.⁹ By faith he dwelt in the land of promise as in a foreign country, dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise;¹⁰ for he waited for the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God.

Abraham's faith was not a blind faith, even though he did not know where he was going.

Abraham's faith was not in the land, but in the God Who had promised land and descendants to him.

Though the Canaanites dwelt in cities, Abraham was content to dwell in tents (Heb. 11:9). The city dweller considers himself a permanent resident. One dwelling in a tent considers himself a temporary resident. While the land of Canaan was given to Abraham by God's decree, he considered himself a foreigner in a foreign land. This might seem to indicate unbelief on the part of Abraham. HOWEVER, it actually reveals that there was a future fulfillment within God's promise that needed to be embraced by Abraham – and looked forward to by faith.

Heb. 11:10 – Abraham “waited for the city which as foundations, whose builder and maker is God.” The city God had promised Abraham would not be built in the land of Canaan but rather would be a heavenly city in which Abraham would eventually dwell

together with the God Whose promises Abraham believed (Heb. 12:22-24). Because that heavenly city was to be Abraham's final destiny, he considered himself only a temporary resident in the land of Canaan.

Our faith is often tested most when our present circumstances seem completely contrary to what God has revealed to us through His Word. This is what Abraham faced. While we note some of his deep feelings and conversations with God recorded in Scripture – we see a life of obedience and patient endurance in the midst of definite challenges. This is essentially the lesson of Hebrews 11.

Hebrews 11:11-12

¹¹ *By faith Sarah herself also received strength to conceive seed, and she bore a child^[b] when she was past the age, because she judged Him faithful who had promised.* ¹² *Therefore from one man, and him as good as dead, were born as many as the stars of the sky in multitude—innumerable as the sand which is by the seashore.*

Sarah is presented as one whose faith in the promise of God produced patient endurance. Sarah's faith was not perfect! Consider – when Sarah, who had been barren through her life (Gen. 16:1), realized she did not have the ability to provide Abraham with the son through whom God's promise would be fulfilled, and believing the promise must be fulfilled, she offered Abraham her servant as a concubine! It was Sarah's belief in the promise that led to this incorrect solution and from this union Ishmael was born. Sarah's faith in the promise of God, though misapplied in the incident with Hagar, was significant enough for God to include in this "hall of faith."

Hebrews 11:13-16

¹³ *These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off were assured of them,^[c] embraced them and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth.* ¹⁴ *For those who say such things declare plainly that they seek a homeland.* ¹⁵ *And truly if they had called to mind that country from which they had come out, they would have had opportunity to return.* ¹⁶ *But now they desire a better, that is, a heavenly country. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for He has prepared a city for them.*

The faith of Abraham and Sarah looked beyond the birth of Isaac, because his birth did not fulfill ALL God had promised to them. Hebrews 11:10 – the "waited for the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God." By faith they were content to dwell as strangers and pilgrims in Canaan, awaiting the ultimate fulfillment of what God had promised them.

Hebrews 11:17-19

¹⁷ *By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac, and he who had received the promises offered up his only begotten son,* ¹⁸ *of whom it was said, "In Isaac your seed*

shall be called, "[d] 19 concluding that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead, from which he also received him in a figurative sense.

While awaiting the ultimate fulfillment of God's promise, Abraham demonstrated the patient endurance of faith by obeying God's command to offer that promised son as a sacrifice (Gen. 22). The test was not so much whether he would obey God. It was a test whether he would believe that God would fulfill His promises in spite of the death of the only one through whom they could be fulfilled!! Abraham could believe that the promise would be fulfilled through Isaac because he believed that "God was able to raise him up, even from the dead" (Heb. 11:19).

Consider – Isaac was offered up as an act of worship to God!

The author is telling the readers to "imitate those who through faith and patience inherit the promises" (Heb. 6:12).

Hebrews 11:20-22

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

²¹ *By faith Jacob, when he was dying, blessed each of the sons of Joseph, and worshiped, leaning on the top of his staff.*

²² *By faith Joseph, when he was dying, made mention of the departure of the children of Israel, and gave instructions concerning his bones.*

The covenant given to Abraham was reaffirmed to Isaac (Gen. 26:1-5). Isaac designated Jacob as the appointed heir of the promises and conferred blessing upon him (Gen. 27:26-29). Jacob designated Joseph as his heir (Gen. 37:3) and, before his death, pronounced blessings upon his sons (Gen. 48:10-22). In each of these historical instances, God's original promise and covenant with Abraham is reiterated, recalling that God gave the land of Canaan to Abraham and Abraham's descendants as their possession unconditionally and eternally. Each patriarch who conferred blessings on the next generation did so by faith, anticipating the eventual fulfillment of God's covenant. Thus, faith produced patient endurance.

Just before he died, Joseph reiterated his faith in the promise of God saying, "God will surely visit you, and bring you out of this land (Egypt) to the land of which He swore to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob" (Gen. 50:24). Because of his faith in God, Joseph was certain of the eventual restoration of Jacob's descendants to the land of promise that he made the Israelites promise with an oath that when the return came his bones would be carried from Egypt to the promised land (Gen. 50:25).

Do we have such confidence in God's promises?

Hebrews 11:23-29

²³ *By faith Moses, when he was born, was hidden three months by his parents, because they saw he was a beautiful child; and they were not afraid of the king's command.*

²⁴ *By faith Moses, when he became of age, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, ²⁵ choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin, ²⁶ esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in^{lel} Egypt; for he looked to the reward.*

²⁷ *By faith he forsook Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king; for he endured as seeing Him who is invisible. ²⁸ By faith he kept the Passover and the sprinkling of blood, lest he who destroyed the firstborn should touch them.*

²⁹ *By faith they passed through the Red Sea as by dry land, whereas the Egyptians, attempting to do so, were drowned.*

The faith in God exemplified by Moses was first seen in his parents. Pharaoh had issued a decree that all male Hebrews were to be drowned at birth (Ex. 1:22). BUT, faith in God's promise concerning the future of Abraham's descendants was greater than their fear of any consequences from Pharaoh's hand. They looked for a means whereby Moses – the heir of promise – might be spared (Ex. 2:3). Moses' parents lived in a time of great adversity. Yet their faith operated even in the mist of their circumstances.

Moses demonstrated his faith in God Who had given promises to his ancestors. God's program was not to be fulfilled through Egypt's throne – but through a throne which God would establish with Abraham's descendants. Moses *refused* (11:24) – Moses made a decision which was prompted by his faith. Moses forfeited a royal position. He disassociated himself with the royal family to identify himself with a race – his people – who had been reduced to slavery (Ex. 1:8-14). Here is a life example of faith choosing adversity over disobedience!

The “reproach of Christ” (11:26) can be understood in several ways:

- It can refer to the reproach that Jesus would bear – tho' yet future in Moses' day – it was an historic fact from the standpoint of the readers (Rom. 15:3; Psa. 69:9).
- It can refer to the reproach Moses bore because of his relationship to the promised and anticipated Messiah – to the object of his faith! Moses chose rejection and suffering.

Moses was so assured of what God had promised that on the basis of that confidence he could separate himself from all the privileges of the royal court. In Heb. 11:27 the author tells us that Moses forsook Egypt as a result of his faith. After spending 40 years in the desert on the backside of Mount Horeb, herding sheep – not even his own sheep – he confronted Pharaoh. . . .

Heb. 11:28 – by faith Moses kept the Passover – he obeyed God’s instructions. What kind of deliverance was this?

The final example of Moses’ faith is when in obedience to the command of God, he “passed through the Red Sea” (Heb. 11:29). For the children of Israel to pass through the Red Sea was an act of faith, for they had no such previous experience upon which to rely.

Hebrews 11:30-31

³⁰ *By faith the walls of Jericho fell down after they were encircled for seven days.* ³¹ *By faith the harlot Rahab did not perish with those who did not believe, when she had received the spies with peace.*

Joshua was commissioned to take over for Moses. And then God tells Joshua to conquer Jericho in the most odd fashion!

Rahab is an illustration of the fact that even a Gentile of such questionable character could be delivered by faith from the judgment decreed upon the inhabitants of Jericho. Through God’s deliverance of the children of Israel from Egypt, knowledge of the true and living God had been brought to Rahab. She confessed, “the Lord your God, He is God in heaven above and on earth beneath” (Josh. 2:11). She also believed that the God Whom she had come to revere was about to bring judgment on her city through its overthrow. She pleaded with Joshua that her life and the life of her family might be spared (Josh. 2:12-13). Joshua gave the commandment that when the city fell, Rahab and her family were to be spared (Josh. 6:17). The genuineness of Rahab’s faith had been demonstrated by the protection she provided for the spies. It was not Rahab’s works that delivered her from judgment. It was her faith in God. Rahab believed in God and believed that the land would be given to Israel according to His promise (Josh. 2:8).

All the inhabitants of Jericho were terrified. Yet, despite what they knew and feared, they fought against God’s people and resisted His will. They refused to surrender to God. BUT Rahab acknowledged the Lord as God of heaven and earth. Rahab sought refuge in God. Knowing truth about God provokes one of two responses. Man either rejects Him and resists His will or man surrenders and seeks refuge in Him.

Hebrews 11:32-35a

³² *And what more shall I say? For the time would fail me to tell of Gideon and Barak and Samson and Jephthah, also of David and Samuel and the prophets: ³³ who through faith subdued kingdoms, worked righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, ³⁴ quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness were made strong, became valiant in battle, turned to flight the armies of the aliens. ³⁵ Women received their dead raised to life again.*

For some, counting on the unseen produced victories.

Gideon - his army was reduced to 300 – and Gideon exercised faith in God (Judges 7:15) and proceeded into the conflict.

Barak (Judges 4) led 10,000 men of the tribes of Naphtali and Zebulun against Sisera – the captain of the host of the King of Canaan.

Samson attacked the Philistines with nothing more than a fresh jawbone of a donkey (Judges 15:15).

God used Jephthah to defeat the Ammonites (Judges 11:32-33).

Samuel was commanded by the Lord to anoint David to be king (I Sam. 16:12-13). It was not until years later that David was anointed King over Judah (II Sam. 2:4) and then anointed King over all the tribes of Israel (II Sam. 5:3). David was called upon to exercise patient endurance while he awaited fulfillment of what God had promised.

Samuel's role as prophet/judge was marked by his ready obedience to the will of God as it was revealed to him. This obedience was the product of his faith. Samuel's faith produced a righteousness in his life so that none in Israel could find fault with him (I Sam. 12:1-5).

The author is telling his readers that trials should not nullify faith, but rather should strengthen faith! Faith is not only tested by trials, it is strengthened by trials!

Hebrews 11:35b-38

Others were tortured, not accepting deliverance, that they might obtain a better resurrection. ³⁶ Still others had trial of mockings and scourgings, yes, and of chains and imprisonment. ³⁷ They were stoned, they were sawn in two, were tempted,^[f] were slain with the sword. They wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins, being destitute, afflicted, tormented—³⁸ of whom the world was not worthy. They wandered in deserts and mountains, in dens and caves of the earth.

For some, counting on the unseen produced suffering and even death. The readers could relate – altho' they had not yet sacrificed their lives because of their faith in Jesus. The author doesn't want the readers to suppose that living by faith guarantees an easy or prosperous life. Living by faith truly is commitment to the unseen. God has something far better in mind for His people than a few pleasant decades in this world. God has ETERNITY in view.

Hebrews 11:39-40

³⁹ *And all these, having obtained a good testimony through faith, did not receive the promise,* ⁴⁰ *God having provided something better for us, that they should not be made perfect apart from us.*

None of the “faith heroes” listed in Hebrews 11 saw fulfillment of the dream in their own lifetimes. They had glimpses, visitations, patterns, shadows. Previews of coming attractions – just enough to keep their faith alive. God’s progressive revelation – His plan for the world unfolding – all for HIS GLORY!!!

Amidst the challenges believers experience, we have HOPE of something better – Phil. 3:20-21: ²⁰For our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, ²¹ who will transform our lowly body that it may be conformed to His glorious body, according to the working by which He is able even to subdue all things to Himself.

We haven’t experienced the fullness of the hoped-for as yet. But by faith we see it from here! This is what the writer of Hebrews wanted the readers – and us – to realize. As the ages have passed, men and women of faith have lived and died without having “received the promises” (Heb. 11:13). But when the last age that God has framed comes to an end, when history is succeeded by eternity, men and women of faith will all come home – “made perfect” together (Heb. 11:40)

And then the celebration will never end!

QUESTIONS

What is the significance of the “seen vs. unseen” theme in the book of Hebrews?

What was the specific faith-response of each of these individuals that won him or her a place in Hebrews 11: Abel; Noah; Joseph; Rahab?

Why does the writer explain that “without faith it is impossible to please Him” in his comment on Enoch (Heb. 11:6)? How is pleasing God further expanded in II Cor. 5:9? What is the context?

How were people saved in the OT?