

BY FAITH

Hebrews 11

It is a common misconception that people who lived during the Old Testament were saved by keeping the Law of Moses while those who lived after Jesus are saved by grace. This error was perpetuated by the Pharisees in Judaism and later by the Judaizers in the Church. The Apostle Paul combatted this error in both Romans and Galatians.

The truth of the matter is that in every dispensation, sinners are reconciled to God by faith. Faith is the basis by which every sinner from Adam & Eve to the last person born in the Millennial Kingdom is justified before God. No sinner has or ever will be declared righteous by God on the basis of keeping the Law or by good works.

In the previous section of 10:19-39, the Preacher exhorted his readers to draw near, hold firm and stir one another up to love and good works. He warned them not to return to Judaism lest they die in the judgment soon coming upon that generation (66-70 A.D.). He encouraged them to continue enduring as they have been doing. They need to continue to have faith in God and His promises.

Earlier in 6:12 he encouraged them to be *imitators of those who through faith and patience inherit the promises*. Here in chapter 11 he provides a list of those whose faith they should emulate. In 11:2 the Preacher states that because of their faith these people *received their commendation*. The term *commendation* in this context means to be lauded, to be well spoken of. The One giving the assessment is God Himself. In other words, because of their faith, the people listed in Hebrews 11 were spoken well of by God; He declared them righteous in His eyes. Because of their faith He was pleased with them.

You'll notice the majority of examples pre-date the giving of the Law of Moses. Most likely this is intentional on the part of the Preacher. He is stressing that faith, not the Law, is the basis of salvation and drawing near to God. It was not on the basis of keeping the Law of Moses that these men and women were commended by God but on the basis of their faith.

Faith Is... (11:1-2)

Hebrews 11:1-2 (ESV)

¹ Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. ² For by it the people of old received their commendation.

The term *assurance* in this context means *the ground of confidence, assurance, guarantee or proof*. The Preacher says that faith is the ground of confidence of *things hoped for*. In other words, faith is the basis for a hope of something in the future. When I board a plane in San Diego bound for Dallas I have a hope of arriving in Dallas. My faith in the pilots, the ground crew, the maintenance crew, the design of the plane and previous experiences of flying are the ground of confidence for my hope of arriving in Dallas. The realization of my hope is completely dependent upon the trustworthiness of those things in which I am placing my faith.

Conviction in this context means *certain persuasion*. Faith not only has to do with hopes concerning the future but with things we cannot see. We cannot see God. We cannot see Jesus sitting at the right of the Father. We did not see God create the universe. But faith based on facts and evidences produces *conviction* that these and other things we cannot see with our eyes are, in fact, real and true.

Creation (11:3)

Hebrews 11:3 (ESV)

³ By faith we understand that the universe was created by the word of God, so that what is seen was not made out of things that are visible.

The Preacher begins with Genesis 1:1. Our faith that God created the universe is constantly attacked in our secular universities and the media. Listed here are but four resources to help you learn the facts by which we hold firm our faith that God created the heavens and the earth.

- Institute for Creation Research <http://www.icr.org/>
- Logos Research Associates <http://www.logosresearchassociates.org/>
- Answers in Genesis <https://answersingenesis.org/answers/>
- Creation Education Center <http://www.cecwisc.org/>

Pre-Flood Examples of Faith (11:4-7)

Hebrews 11:4-7 (ESV)

⁴ By faith **Abel** offered to God a more acceptable sacrifice than Cain, through which he was commended as righteous, God commending him by accepting his gifts. And through his faith, though he died, he still speaks.

Abel still speaks in the sense that even after many millennia he continues to teach us what genuine faith looks like. Genuine faith obeys God's word.

⁵ By faith **Enoch** was taken up so that he should not see death, and he was not found, because God had taken him. Now before he was taken he was commended as having pleased God. ⁶ And without faith it is impossible to please him, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him.

Enoch was Noah's great grandfather. He lived in a very dark time spiritually in the history of the world; a time when the thoughts and intentions of men were only evil continually. Enoch walked with God and God translated him to heaven. Notice the contrast between Abel and Enoch. Abel was murdered by Cain for his faith; Enoch was translated to heaven. Faith does not always result in blessing in this life contrary to the health, wealth and prosperity gospel.

⁷ By faith **Noah**, being warned by God concerning events as yet unseen, in reverent fear constructed an ark for the saving of his household. By this he condemned the world and became an heir of the righteousness that comes by faith.

Noah had never seen rain much less a rainstorm that would flood the earth. But he believed God and obeyed His command to build an ark. Undoubtedly he was ridiculed and mocked, but in the end he was vindicated.

Patriarchal Examples of Faith (11:8-22)

Hebrews 11:8–22 (ESV)

⁸ **By faith Abraham** obeyed when he was called to go out to a place that he was to receive as an inheritance. And he went out, not knowing where he was going. ⁹ **By faith** he went to live in the land of promise, as in a foreign land, living in tents with Isaac and Jacob, heirs with him of the same promise. ¹⁰ For he was looking forward to the city that has foundations, whose designer and builder is God.

This indicates God revealed the heavenly Jerusalem to Abraham as his ultimate dwelling place in the Millennial Kingdom, New Heaven and New Earth.

¹¹ **By faith Sarah** herself received power to conceive, even when she was past the age, since she considered him faithful who had promised. ¹² Therefore from one man, and him as good as dead, were born descendants as many as the stars of heaven and as many as the innumerable grains of sand by the seashore.

¹³ 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. ¹⁴ For people who speak thus make it clear that they are seeking a homeland. ¹⁵ If they had been thinking of that land from which they had gone out, they would have had opportunity to return. ¹⁶ But as it is, they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared for them a city.

¹⁷ **By faith Abraham**, when he was tested, offered up Isaac, and he who had received the promises was in the act of offering up his only son, ¹⁸ of whom it was said, “Through Isaac shall your offspring be named.” ¹⁹ He considered that God was able even to raise him from the dead, from which, figuratively speaking, he did receive him back.

We tend to focus on Abraham’s agony and Isaac’s submission on this occasion. But what is truly noteworthy is the sophistication of Abraham’s faith. Though he had not witnessed a resurrection, Abraham reasoned that God would raise Isaac from the dead after he, Abraham, sacrificed Isaac. He reasoned thus because of his faith in the certainty of God’s promise that *through Isaac shall your offspring be named*.

²⁰ **By faith Isaac** invoked future blessings on Jacob and Esau.

²¹ **By faith Jacob**, when dying, blessed each of the sons of Joseph, bowing in worship over the head of his staff.

²² **By faith Joseph**, at the end of his life, made mention of the exodus of the Israelites and gave directions concerning his bones.

Moses An Example of Faith (11:23-28)

Hebrews 11:23–28 (ESV)

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

This is actually a testimony to the faith of Moses' parents. Moms and Dads, may we be raising our children in households of faith!

²⁴ **By faith Moses**, when he was grown up, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, ²⁵ choosing rather to be mistreated with the people of God than to enjoy the fleeting pleasures of sin. ²⁶ He considered the reproach of Christ greater wealth than the treasures of Egypt, for he was looking to the reward.

Moses had it made in the world's terms. But undoubtedly taught the promises of God by his mother in his early years, Moses identified with the Hebrews slaves. The *reproach of Christ* most probably refers to the reproach of the Hebrew slaves (the people of God vs. 25). *Christ* translates the Greek phrase "the anointed" which in context are the Jewish people. Because of his faith in the promises of God to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, Moses considered the reproach of the anointed people of God (the Hebrews) greater wealth than the treasures of Egypt.

²⁷ **By faith he** left Egypt, not being afraid of the anger of the king, for he endured as seeing him who is invisible.

²⁸ **By faith he** kept the Passover and sprinkled the blood, so that the Destroyer of the firstborn might not touch them.

Notice that these examples of faith in the life of Moses all took place prior to the giving of the Law. Again, the point of the Preacher is that God commends those who live by faith.

Heroes of Israel as Examples of Faith (11:29-38)

Hebrews 11:29–38 (ESV)

²⁹ **By faith the people** crossed the Red Sea as on dry land, but the Egyptians, when they attempted to do the same, were drowned.

³⁰ **By faith the walls** of Jericho fell down after they had been encircled for seven days.

³¹ **By faith Rahab** the prostitute did not perish with those who were disobedient, because she had given a friendly welcome to the spies.

Rahab, a Canaanite prostitute was saved not only from the destruction of Jericho but she became the great-great-grandmother of David which means she became part of the blood line of Messiah (Matt. 1:5)! God would have shown the same kind of grace to all the inhabitants of Canaan if they had responded in faith to the same forty years of evidence to which Rahab had responded in faith.

³² And what more shall I say? For time would fail me to tell of Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, of David and Samuel and the prophets—³³ who through faith conquered kingdoms, enforced justice, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions,³⁴ quenched the power of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, were made strong out of weakness, became mighty in war, put foreign armies to flight.³⁵ Women received back their dead by resurrection. Some were tortured, refusing to accept release, so that they might rise again to a better life.³⁶ Others suffered mocking and flogging, and even chains and imprisonment.³⁷ They were stoned, they were sawn in two, they were killed with the sword. They went about in skins of sheep and goats, destitute, afflicted, mistreated—³⁸ of whom the world was not worthy—wandering about in deserts and mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth.

I'm pretty sure the "name it and claim it" crowd seldom preach from this passage! Faith in God and His promises does not guarantee health, wealth and prosperity in this life. Abel was murdered because of his faith; Enoch was translated to heaven. Because of his faith, God stopped the mouths of the lions in the pit into which Daniel was pitched. But the prophet Jeremiah suffered *mockings and scourgings*. Jewish tradition claims that Isaiah was sawed in half by Manasseh.

What is certain is that God will fulfill His promises. We are looking forward to the fulfillment of the same promises they were holding to.

Still Walking By Faith (11:39-40)

Hebrews 11:39–40 (ESV)

³⁹ And all these, though commended through their faith, did not receive what was promised,⁴⁰ since God had provided something better for us, that apart from us they should not be made perfect.

We walk in solidarity with those who lived by faith before us. By faith we all look towards the coming Millennial Kingdom, the New Heaven and the New Earth. Though not all the promises are identical they are intertwined and await a future fulfillment.

Reflections

- ❖ Faith pleases God. God commends, speaks well of, those who believe He and His Word are trustworthy. It is and has always been that God declares us righteous on the basis of our faith not our works.
- ❖ Genuine faith always manifests itself in obedience to God's Word. What we do proves what we believe.
- ❖ Temporal blessings may or may not accompany faith. It depends on God's purpose for each believer.
- ❖ Those who persevere in faith will inherit the promises.