

FPFWC Christian Development



Faith Gives Us Hope

August 2021

Summer Quarter

August 7, 2021

Lesson #1 –A Necessary Faith

Scripture Focus – Hebrews 11:1-8, 13-16

ICE BREAKER –

1. *What role does faith play in approaching and pleasing God?*
2. *Why do you think God sometimes leaves us in the dark about His will?*

Key Verse: Faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen. Hebrews 11:1

LESSON BACKGROUND

Older commentaries on Hebrews focus on a limited set of questions regarding authorship, recipients, and its worthiness to be considered Scripture. For example, a well-known commentary published in 1876 made an extended argument for authorship by the apostle Paul, a position held by almost no one in our own day.

In keeping with scholarship of the day, the author went on to assert with confidence that the letter was addressed to Jewish converts to Christianity in Palestine. Finally, the writer argued for the book's inclusion in Scripture on four bases: it (1) was written by Paul, (2) was quoted as Scripture, (3) is found in the oldest versions of Scripture, and (4) features internal evidences for such inclusion (namely, its teaching is in harmony with the rest of Scripture).

With the passing of a century and a half since publication of that commentary, we can assert that we know both more and less about the background of Hebrews than we did then. Modern commentaries reflect the wealth of knowledge that we now have about the Jewish and Greek cultural, philosophical, and religious environment in which the letter was written. All of this enriches our understanding of the letter, but gets us no closer to an answer to some of the most basic questions that we still have. Chief among those is the question of who wrote it.

Even though no author is specified, a better understanding of the contexts mentioned above and of the rhetorical skill that lies behind the composition of the letter tells us a lot about the author. The person was educated, based on the quality of the Greek writing. The author also knew Greek culture and philosophy, interacting with both in argument and examples.

Although Hebrews 11 is often treated as a standalone unit of Scripture, it is important to note that the writer of the letter has been building toward it by the time it is reached. Although we do not cover them in today's lesson, the themes of faith and patient endurance, touched on in Hebrews 10:35–39, provide the launching point for the discussion of faith in chapter 11. We can see the author building on

the idea of faith as pilgrimage as far back as chapters 3 and 4. With that, we turn to the text.

LESSON COMMENTARY

11:1–2. Prologue. Faith is not formally defined here, but what is given is a description of what **faith** does. There are two parts to the description. First, **faith** gives an **assurance of things hoped for**; i.e., the certainty of things future, such as the second coming of Christ, resurrection and glorification of the dead, being taken to heaven, etc. Second, faith provides **the conviction of things not seen**; i.e., the persuasion of things invisible, such as the forgiveness of sins, the Holy Spirit living within believers, Christ as intercessor, and our access to God in prayer. These characteristics are not impractical. **For by** the possession and exercise of faith in daily life, our ancestors received divine **approval** on their lives.

11:3–12. First “By Faith” Series. To show that the characteristics of faith in 11:1 are not alien to any of his readership, in 11:3 the writer starts with Gn 1: **By faith we understand that the worlds were prepared by the word of God.** There were no human eyewitnesses to the making of the material universe. Scripture attributes it to divine activity, and we believe it. From Heb 11:3 onward, individuals who displayed faith are mentioned. From Gn 4, **by faith** in the divine revelation that heaven requires bloody sacrifices, **Abel offered to God a better sacrifice than Cain** (Heb 11:4), and **Cain** became enraged at God’s acceptance of his brother’s sacrifice (see the comments on Gn 4:5–7). From Gn 5, **by faith Enoch ... was pleasing to God** (Heb 11:5). This expression **by faith** means that he believed the disclosure of all the divine truth revealed to him was factual, that he conformed his character and conduct to it, and that he lived in dependency on God. With such faith, it is possible for anyone to thus please God (11:6). From Gn 6–9, **Noah** took to heart the warning about a flood that was **not yet seen** (Heb 11:7). But his faith was seen in building **an ark** that delivered **his household**. From Gn 12, convinced **by faith** about a **place** he would someday **receive**, Abraham left home before knowing the location of that place (Heb 11:8). After arriving in it, **by faith** he **lived** for decades **in the land of promise**, waiting for the Lord to give the land to him (11:9). From Gn 21, **by faith** in divine fidelity, his wife **Sarah**, though barren, **received ability to conceive** (Heb 11:11). Consequently, from this elderly, impotent couple came offspring as numerous **AS THE STARS OF HEAVEN** (11:12).

11:13–16. Editorial Commentary. In this brief aside, the author gives his own perspective on the OT people of faith mentioned thus far. They all **died in faith, without receiving** all blessings divinely promised (11:13). **But** they gradually saw these promises **from a distance**—i.e., they would be fulfilled on the other side of the grave. As their life drew to a close, these believers **welcomed** the promises or joyfully anticipated them in the next life, confessing to being temporary residents **on the earth** (11:13). True, they were **seeking** a homeland (11:14), but a **heavenly** (11:16) and not an earthly one (11:15). No doubt Abraham expected an ultimate literal fulfillment of the land promises of the Abrahamic covenant in the

future millennial kingdom. Nevertheless, upon his death, he was looking for a heavenly homeland, beyond this life.

LESSON NUGGET – Faith is confidence in God that leads to obedience to God. True faith is based on what God says and is demonstrated in what we do. People with faith do things for God, and God does things for them. Faith is not a luxury; it is a necessity.

Sources: *Moody Bible Commentary, Standard Lesson Commentary, The Essential Everyday Bible Commentary and Wiersbe Expository Outlines on the New Testament*