

Hebrews 11:1-16

Chapter 11 begins a new section that gives testimony to some of God's special heroes of faith.

These servants of God lived in four different dispensations, all of which were but preparatory periods leading up to the age of grace, so they did not have God's full revelation.

However, even in these previous dispensations, faith was the controlling power that enabled them to walk with God and triumph over the evil influences of their day.

So it is important to remember that God has never had two ways of saving man.

Although the revelation of His grace has been gradual, and at different times He has used different rights and ceremonies (such as the tabernacle and its sacrifices), yet these in themselves had no power to regenerate or justify the sinner.

It has always been faith in God's Word, whatever that Word may have been at the time, which has justified man before God.

Man in every age has been saved not by their works, but by demonstrating their faith in God and His provision to redeem them.

For instance, it says in Romsnd 4:3---

"Abraham believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness."

And Jesus also testified of Abraham's faith when He said **"Your father Abraham rejoiced to see my day: and he saw it, and was glad."**

So, in Old Testament times, men of faith looked forward to the cross, while we look backward to Calvary.

This God-given faith that existed in Old Testament times is celebrated here in Chapter 11.

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First of all, in verses 1-3, we are shown the nature of faith.

V 1-3 **"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."**

By nature we lean very heavily toward the
material.

In spite of the fact that our eyes can fool
us, we still hold to the theory that
seeing is believing.

Yes, we are weak in faith.

We would sooner see things materialize than
have faith that they *will* happen.

But true faith, if it is faith in God, is as
good as the real thing.

Yes, **"--faith is the substance of things
hoped for, the evidence of things not
seen."**

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V 2 **"For by it the elders obtained a good report."**

There is some speculation here about who these elders were.

Personally, I believe they were the Old Testament saints such as Abraham, Moses, and others who walked the pathway of faith.

Now V 2 says, because of their faith in God, they obtained a good report, which brings out the point that God does keep a report on our faith.

At the end of our school term down here, I wonder what kind of a report card we will bring home?

It's worth thinking about, isn't it?

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Verse 3 says, **"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."**

Here we see one of the first articles of
faith.

Do we believe that God made the world? And
not out of some pre-existent matter,
but out of nothing?

You see, faith not only looks forward and
believes, but faith also looks backward
and believes.

All through the centuries, man has
speculated as to the origin of the
universe.

For instance, they have come up with the
"big bang" theory.

They see our gigantic universe as a long-
lasting explosion.

Now that's comforting, isn't it?

And now we are sending unmanned vehicles to Mars to scratch around in the rocks. One thing they are looking for is evidence that there might have been water on that planet at some time.

The thinking is, if you have water, then you can have life.

The fact of the matter is God, not water, is the source of life.

But they are spending millions of dollars and employing some of our greatest minds on this project.

Why?

Because they say it might tell us something about our own origins.

They might discover how we were created, how life was formed.

But they will never find the answer on Mars.

However, to the man of faith, it is all very clear.

V 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."**

I remember one night, many years ago, when I was taking a night-school course, the teacher told us about an exciting piece of news.

He had just been up to the university that day, and the big news that the professors were discussing was the possibility that the nucleus of atoms, which they had previously thought to be matter, might actually be bundles of energy.

So here was the centre of all that we call material, and it might not be material

after all. Possibly it might be energy.

They were actually considering the possibility that the basic element of all matter, that which we see and handle and analyze, was a kind of force.

They were getting pretty close to the truth, weren't they?

I remember thinking of this verse in Hebrews--"**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.**"

Yes, all of creation is based upon the power in God's Word.

In Genesis Chapter 1, the Holy Spirit,
speaking of creation, uses one phrase
over and over again---"**And God said.**"

Yes, God said it, and it was so.

The theories of science will come and go,
and in the end, they will know nothing.

But to the eye of faith, all is plain.

The simplest Christian with his Bible before
him can say by "**faith we understand
that the worlds were framed by the word
of God.**"

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So the Holy Spirit, having analyzed faith,
now begins God's Honour Roll.

First, we see three examples taken from the
dispensation of conscience. That is,
from the time of Adam and Eve's
expulsion from the garden, to the
flood.

V 4 " **By faith Abel offered unto God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, by which he obtained witness that he was righteous, God testifying of his gifts: and by it he being dead yet speaketh.**"

How did Abel understand that he could only approach God by a blood sacrifice?

It would not be an easy thing to do, for, no doubt, up to this time, he had never killed one of his flock for food.

We can draw this conclusion because Genesis 1 tells us that men were vegetarians at that time.

Genesis 1:29 **"And God said, Behold, I have given you every herb bearing seed, which is upon the face of all the earth, and every tree, in the which is the fruit of a tree yielding seed; to you it shall be for meat." (or food)**

Actually, it was not until Noah came out of the ark that God commanded man to eat meat.

Genesis 9:3 **"Every moving thing that liveth shall be meat for you; even as the green herb have I given you all things."**

So Abel only kept his sheep to supply himself with wool for clothing, not for food.

Since he had never killed one of his lambs before, the decision to provide a blood sacrifice must have been very difficult.

How did Abel arrive at that difficult decision?

Verse 4 tells us his decision was based on faith--**"By faith Abel offered."**

And, since faith is taking God at His word,
then it seems logical to assume that
God had spoken to Abel and told him
that man's approach to Himself must
involve a blood sacrifice.

So Abel put aside any negative feelings he
might have had, and accepted God's
instructions by faith.

And also, in that act of sacrifice, Abel
admitted his own unworthiness to come
to God on his own merits.

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No doubt Cain had been given the same
revelation, but, unlike his brother, he
ignored God, and did it his way.

By faith only Abel **"obtained witness that he
was righteous, God testifying of his
gifts."**

So then, Abel's righteousness was not of works, but consisted of believing God, and acting accordingly.

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Also, verse 4 tells us that Abel **"being dead yet speaketh."**

Abel died for his faith.

He was the world's first martyr, but he left behind him a testimony.

First of all, he testified that fallen man could come to God and worship.

Secondly, he showed, by his actions, that the way to God must involve the admission of sin, and a blood sacrifice.

Abel's sacrifice has been a testimony down through the ages; however, it was only a sacrifice that looked *forward* to a better sacrifice.

Hebrews 12:24 **"And to Jesus the mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling, that speaketh better things than that of Abel."**

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In Enoch, we see yet another truth illustrated.

V 5 **"By faith Enoch was translated that he should not see death; and was not found, because God had translated him: for before his translation he had this testimony, that he pleased God."**

Let's turn to Genesis 5 for a moment, and learn a little more about this man of God.

Genesis 5:22-24 **"And Enoch walked with God after he begat Methuselah three hundred years, and begat sons and daughters:**

²³ **And all the days of Enoch were**

three hundred sixty and five years:

24 And Enoch walked with God: and he was not; for God took him."

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A little girl came home from Sunday school one day, and told her mother that they had learned all about Enoch.

Her mother said, "That's lovely dear. Can you tell me the story?"

So the little girl told her, in her own words, what she had learned:

"Enoch lived a long time ago, and God would come by every afternoon and say to him, 'Enoch, would you like to take a walk with Me?'

Enoch would say, 'Yes, I'd like to take a walk with you, God.'

And so everyday, God would come by Enoch's house, and Enoch would go walking with God.

One day God came by and said, 'Enoch, let's take a long walk today.'

So Enoch got his coat, even took his lunch, and they started walking.

They walked, and they walked, and they walked, and finally it got late.

Enoch said, "My, it's getting late, and I'm a long way from home. Maybe we'd better start back."

But God said, 'Enoch, you're closer to My home than you are to yours, so you come along home with Me.'"

And so Enoch went home with God."

I don't think we could tell it any better than that, could we?

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Hebrews 11:5-6 **"By faith Enoch was translated that he should not see death; and was not found, because God had translated him: for before his translation he had this testimony, that he pleased God.**

⁶ **But without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him."**

Verse 5 says that Enoch **"pleased God."**

The question comes, In what way did He please God?

Well, Verse 6 says that you can't please God without faith.

"But without faith it is impossible to please him."

So it is obvious that God was pleased with Enoch because Enoch trusted Him.

As Verse 6 tells us, he believed that God existed, and he believed that God would reward him for seeking after Him.

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So, the life of Abel, and the life of Enoch, demonstrate two aspects of faith.

First, we must offer a blood sacrifice to restore fellowship with God.

And it is through Christ, our sacrifice for sin, that we have been made acceptable to God.

That is Abel's lesson.

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But what can Enoch teach us?

Well, as a Christian, we need to learn how to walk daily with God, and that requires the faith of Enoch.

Enoch's walk was characterized by implicit faith, and, by the way, that pleased God.

So what do these two men have to say to us?

I think their lessons are nicely summed up

in Colossians 2:6--"**As ye have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk ye in him.**"

And that's by faith, isn't?

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V 7 "**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; by the which he condemned the world, and became heir of the righteousness which is by faith.**"

Just before we leave Enoch and go on to Noah, let's take a few moments to see what these two men picture for us.

As I said a few lessons back, the Old Testament is God's picture book, and I think all of us, even though we are grown up, still like to look at picture books.

Enoch is a *picture* of the Church of Jesus Christ.

The church walks with God, or at least it should.

And just as Enoch was translated before the great judgment of the flood, so the church will be translated before the Great Tribulation.

In the Book of Revelation, the church in Philadelphia is told, "**Because thou hast kept the word of my patience, I also will keep thee from the hour of temptation, which shall come upon all**

**the world, to try them that dwell upon
the earth."**

Undoubtedly this verse refers to the Great Tribulation, and the promise is that the church will be raptured before that time.

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In Noah, we see a picture of those who will be kept through the Great Tribulation. We are told in Revelation that before the winds of the Great Tribulation begin to blow across the earth, and the four horsemen of the Apocalypse begin to ride, that 144,000 out of the nation of Israel will be sealed, and also a great company of Gentiles.

Here Noah pictures for us these 144,000 of Israel, and also the great company of Gentiles that are kept safe through

that terrible time of judgment.

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Now those of you who were in the class when we were studying Genesis might remember that I said that the ark was a picture of Christ, and those inside the ark represented the redeemed.

And I still believe that the ark is a beautiful picture of Christ, and Noah and his family is a picture of the church.

Yes, Noah and his family picture the Christians who have fled to Christ for safety from God's righteous judgment.

However, Noah is also a picture of those in Revelation who will be preserved through the tribulation.

So I believe that both types are justified in scripture.

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With this brief explanation of Noah as a type, let's now turn our thoughts to the man himself.

V 7 **"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; by the which he condemned the world, and became heir of the righteousness which is by faith."**

Abel showed the *way* of faith, while Enoch illustrated the *walk* of faith, and now Noah shows us the *witness* of faith.

In verse 7, we see that Noah was forewarned **"of things not seen as yet."**

There were no storm clouds forming on the horizon. There were no visible signs at all of the coming judgment, but by faith, Noah **"moved with fear."**

Even though it would be years before God's judgment would come, this flood was real to Noah.

God's revelation, whether verbal or otherwise, was enough for Noah for **"faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen."**

Not only did he take action by beginning the construction of a large ark and on dry land, no less, but he also became **"a preacher of righteousness,"** warning his neighbours of God's judgment ahead.

Without a doubt, those actions required faith in God's Word.

Not only had there never been a universal flood before, but from what we understand in the Genesis account, probably there had never even been rain before.

Genesis 2:5-6 "--for the LORD God had not caused it to rain upon the earth, and there was not a man to till the ground.

⁶ But there went up a mist from the earth, and watered the whole face of the ground."

We do not really know how long this method of irrigation lasted, but I believe that it continued right up to the time of the flood.

So Noah had never seen water falling out of the sky before.

Truly he had been **"warned of God of things not seen as yet,"** but he still had faith in God's Word.

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On the basis of God's Word, Noah preached faithfully for 120 years without making a single convert.

Well, actually, that was not quite true.
He convinced every member of his family.
They all *believed Dad* even though his
message seemed so unbelievable.

They believed Dad because they knew he was a
man of faith, and they knew he walked
with God.

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So, he **"prepared an ark to the saving of his
house; by the which he condemned the
world, and became heir of the
righteousness which is by faith."**

It says here, **"by the which he condemned the
world."**

His holy fear condemned their security and
vain confidence; his faith condemned
there unbelief; his obedience condemned
their contempt and rebellion.

A good example will either convert sinners
or condemn them.

Verse 7 also says that Noah "**became heir of
the righteousness which is by faith.**"

His righteousness was not founded upon
righteous works, but was a
righteousness that he had become heir
to through faith.

Like today's believer in Christ, he was made
righteous by believing God.

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Noah belonged to two dispensations.

As he stepped *into* the ark, the dispensation
of conscience came to an end.

Under it, man had been tried and found
wanting.

As he stepped *out of* the ark, another age
began, that of the dispensation of
human government.

In this new dispensation, Abraham, a friend of God and the father of God's chosen people, becomes the distinctive figure.

V 8-10 **"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.**

⁹ **By faith he sojourned in the land of promise, as in a strange country, dwelling in tabernacles with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise:**

¹⁰ **For he looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God."**

In the scripture record, the very first step that Abraham took was a step of faith.

V 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.**"

This step was not based on sight but on faith.

Abraham left his home and all his friends without the slightest idea of what his new home was going to be like--"**not knowing whither he went.**"

However, by the eye of faith, he saw clearly, and so he stepped out in confidence because God had spoken.

You see---"**faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.**"

We know from scripture that Abraham did not have a godly heritage.

Joshua says--"**Your fathers dwelt on the other side of the flood in old time, even Terah, the father of Abraham, and the father of Nachor: and they served other gods.**"

But when God revealed himself to Abraham, he followed obediently.

V 8 "**By faith Abraham, when he was called to go out into a place which he should after receive for an inheritance, obeyed.**"

No mention is made here of his failures.

Hebrews does not record the time when he stopped in Heron, or when he did not immediately separate himself from his family.

The important fact was that Abraham, who was brought up as the son of an idol maker, believed and followed God.

God continued to test his faith throughout a long life, and with good results.

For we find "**Abraham believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness.**"

Here again, Abraham's righteousness was not of works, but was a righteousness that looked forward to the Sin Bearer.

Verse 13, speaking of the faithful, says, they saw the promises "**afar off.**"

And when it came to faith, Abraham had 20-20 vision!

Jesus said, "--**Abraham rejoiced to see my day: and he saw it, and was glad.**"

Now, Abraham never *received* all of God's promises in his lifetime, but he still passed down his faith to his son and his grandson.

V 9-10 "By faith he sojourned in the land of promise, as in a strange country, dwelling in tabernacles with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise:

¹⁰ For he looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God."

No, Abraham did not put his faith in some whimsical castle in the air.

Abraham's faith gave "evidence of things not seen." For--"he looked for a city which hath foundations."

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And then in this long line of men, we have testimony to the faith of a woman.

V 11-12 "Through faith also Sara herself received strength to conceive seed, and was delivered of a child when she was

past age, because she judged him faithful who had promised.

¹² Therefore sprang there even of one, and him as good as dead, so many as the stars of the sky in multitude, and as the sand which is by the sea shore innumerable."

We tend to dwell upon Sara's failures.

We remember the time she gave Hagar to

Abraham to raise up seed, and when she laughed at God's promise.

But God remembers her faith when "**she judged him faithful who had promised.**"

The result being that there sprang "**even of one, and him as good as dead, so many as the stars of the sky in multitude, and as the sand which is by the sea shore innumerable.**"

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V 13 "These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them, and embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth.

14 For they that say such things declare plainly that they seek a country.

15 And truly, if they had been mindful of that country from whence they came out, they might have had opportunity to have returned.

16 But now they desire a better country, that is, an heavenly: wherefore God is not ashamed to be called their God: for he hath prepared for them a city."

Had they desired, they could have gone back home to their old ways, to the comfortable things of the past, but they continued to press on, ever following their God.

Therefore, it is His delight to own them as His own, and to link His name with theirs.

They were strangers and pilgrims on the earth, but God has prepared a city for them.

May it be ours to follow in their train, and press on to the rest that remaineth to the people God.