

August 8, 2021

“A Necessary Faith”
Lesson 1 of Unit

Hebrews 11:1-8, 13-16

Intro

In what ways are the “heroes” of the Bible worthy of copying in their practice of the faith? That’s the essential idea at work in today’s passage.

It isn’t known exactly who wrote the book of Hebrews. Some attribute it to Paul, some to Apollos, some to others. Whoever wrote it was educated, using the Greek of the educated and cultural classes more than any other book in the NT. This author knew Greek culture and philosophy well, using both in arguments and examples in the book.

More important than the author is the content of the book. The first half of the book deals heavily with how and why the new covenant is superior to the old covenant. The book was written to Jewish Christians under persecution for following Jesus, and considering returning to the old covenant to escape that persecution. In chapter 10, the author develops the themes of faith and patience, which lead into Chapter 11’s discussion of those who showed great faith and were/are praised for it.

Read Hebrews 11:1-8

1. vs. 1: Faith defined

--confidence in what we hope for

Hope is a key element in this book, and in the lives of Christians

Faith and hope are linked many times (I Cor. 13:13, Gal. 5:5)

A good definition of confidence: “a basis for trust or conviction”

It’s like how a down payment works:

The down gives confidence that the rest is coming

Our faith comes from what God has said and promised

As He has kept His word in the past, we have confidence He will again

--assurance about what we do not see

There are things which are visible and things which are invisible

This connects as well to the material world vs. the spiritual one

--the spiritual world is not less real just because we can’t see it

The word “assurance” works like a legal term or proof

Something has been begun which is guaranteed to be finished/delivered

2. vs. 2: The elders (“heroes of the faith”) were commended

The idea here is that of receiving a witness from someone of doing well

Who gave them that witness, that commendation?

God did

If God was pleased with their actions enough to commend them, then those persons are good examples to be following

3. vs. 3: Faith is needed to understand two things

First, creation

It was formed by God's command

Our faith helps us *understand* this truth despite not seeing it happen

Second, how things are/were made

What we can see is made from things we cannot see

There are atoms we cannot see

There are solar systems we cannot see unless we have telescopes

Faith allows us to understand there are things we cannot see that are still real

This is true especially of spiritual matters

None alive today have seen God or heaven

Yet we believe, through faith, they are as real as people and houses we see

These next five verses show examples of faith

4. vs. 4: The faith of Abel and Cain are contrasted here

Abel offered a better sacrifice through faith

This implies that Cain's offering was not through faith, but by pattern perhaps

Our faith calls us to do acts of worship that follow God's requirements

Abel's sacrifice was seen as righteous and God commended it

Abel's sacrifice still speaks to us today, because Scripture refers to it for our benefit

5. vs. 5: Enoch is mentioned in Genesis 5:21-24

Two things of significance about Enoch

He "walked with God" (Gen.5:22/24)

This says that he was pleasing to God in what he did

He was living a faith-life that God approved of: "one who pleased God"

He "was not, for God took him"

A rare instance where a person is taken away by God without suffering death

Both these things are seen by the Hebrews writer as proof of Enoch's faith (see vs. 6)

6. vs. 6: One of the most well-known verses in Scripture for Christians

"Without faith it is impossible to please God"

Note that this verse follows vs. 5 about Enoch, that "he pleased God"

Vs. 6 is testimony to why God was pleased with him—he showed faith

This verse also shows what someone must do to have a relationship with God

We must "come to Him"

We must believe "that he exists" (KJ—"that He is")

We must believe that "He rewards those who earnestly seek Him."

All three of these actions call for faith

It takes faith to come to Him whom we cannot see and don't hear

It takes faith to believe in Him and believe he will reward seeking Him

The fact that He rewards calls for faith in both the power and goodness of God

7. vs. 7: Noah believed in “things not yet seen”

He believed God when he said a flood was coming and to build the ark

This belief in what isn’t seen is the essence of faith

Note here that faith caused action—what Noah *believed* caused him to *do*

Additionally, Noah’s faith in what God said condemned his neighbors

They didn’t believe even what they saw and heard

They saw the ark being built, and Noah preached for 120 years

They had no faith

Noah’s example is instructive for us today as well

Living out the truth of the gospel is a testimony to and of God

8. vs. 8: Abraham acted by faith (see also 11:9-12, which isn’t part of this week’s study material)

Abraham did like Noah: he *acted* when God called on Him

He left a place he knew to go to a place he didn’t even know of

People generally fear what is unknown; we like certainty

Abraham’s situation is also an example of how God can work

He may ask us in some manner to do something we are less than sure of

He’s looking for believers to show faith and trust in Him

Read Hebrews 11:13-16

This last section deals with the goals of faith

9. vs. 13: A conclusion is being drawn here

All the people mentioned died before seeing the end result of their faith

This shows they were faithful all their lives, still faithful at their deaths

These are commended for showing faith in God despite not getting the end result

Quite a testimony for all believers today

Their faith led them to understand that this world was not the ultimate goal

They were seeking God, and to be with Him

They were “foreigners and strangers” while on Earth

10. vs. 14-15: These two verses comment on vs. 13.

Admitting one is a “foreigner and stranger” shows a different place is “home”

They weren’t just “looking” for this home; they knew it was with God

Their lives were faithful pursuits of life with God, and toward being with Him

The “country they left” and “opportunity to return” are pointed phrases

The writer is appealing to Jewish Christians who are being persecuted

Some were considering returning to Judaism to escape persecution

They had an “opportunity to return” to safer ground

The writer is showing them the rewards and benefits of staying faithful

The OT heroes they have known showed that kind of faith

That faith is what pleases God

11. vs. 16: “Better” is used frequently in Hebrews

A better covenant, a better way, a better sacrifice, etc

Here, it’s a “better country”—heaven rather than earth

They couldn’t see it yet, but they had faith in God, trusted Him

God’s end result would be better than the one they could see

The reward God gives for this kind of faith is substantial

He is not ashamed to be called their God

He has prepared a city for them

Application: This section of Hebrews shows us examples of people who lived by faith, and whose lives serve as an example to us of how to live our lives of faith with God. We all know people in this life who have served as examples to us—preachers, Sunday School teachers, fellow believers. They were all ordinary human beings like us. Yet their lives of faith had a positive impact on us. We too are called to live lives of faith that God can use to impact others’ lives, like the ones recorded in Hebrews 11.

Prayer: Father God, help us to trust You and Your promises. You are always faithful, and desire to reward those who demonstrate faith in you by their lives. Help us to be strengthened in our faith, and to live lives that demonstrate our belief and trust in You. In Jesus’ name, Amen.