

HEBREWS

(Primary textbook: Holy Scriptures. Primary translation: NIV.)

VII. GOD EXPECTS US TO SHOW FAITH (11:1-40)

- A. The Nature of Faith (11:1-3)
- B. Faith Illustrated by Abel, Enoch, and Noah (11:4-7)
- C. Faith Illustrated by Abraham (11:8-19)
- D. Faith Illustrated by Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph (11:20-22)
- E. Faith Illustrated by Moses (11:23-28)
- F. Faith Illustrated by Israel (11:29-39)
- G. God Planned to Make Them Perfect with Us (11:39-40)

(This lesson will cover Section A and Section B.)

The eleventh chapter of Hebrews is the famous chapter on faith. The last paragraph of chapter 10 (Hebrews 10:35-39) actually introduced the idea of faith with an Old Testament quotation from Habakkuk 2:3-4, “My righteous one will live by faith.” The first verse of the chapter gives a general description of faith. The second verse functions as a kind of heading for the eighteen “*pistei*” (Greek, “by faith”) statements of the chapter. In the New International Version (NIV) fifteen of these eighteen statements begin a new paragraph. Verses 9, 27, and 28 do not.

A. The Nature of Faith (11:1-3)

1. Now faith is what two? (1)

The chapter begins with a general description of faith that is twofold. **Faith is** (1) the *hypostasis* (Greek), the essence, the realization (NIV: “being sure”) of what we hope for, and (2) the *elengchos* (Greek), the proof, the conviction (NIV: “being certain”) of what we do not see. The precise meaning of these two nouns has been widely discussed.

2. What group was commended for this? (v.2)

The ancients were commended by God for this faith in His promises and in the future which He held before them, even though there may have been no tangible proof of that future other than God’s total truthfulness. The examples that finish the chapter show this confidence.

3. By what? We understand that what was formed? How? (v.3)

In his first example of faith, **we understand**, the writer draws his readers with himself into the company of the faithful. Ever so gently he stands alongside his readers. At several critical points in the epistle he uses the first person plural, “we” (2:1-2, 8: 3:6, 14; 4:1, 11, 14-16; etc.). It is the shepherd’s heart that draws his flock close to himself so that he may impart some of his strength to them in their weakness. They worried him with their dangerously immature condition (Hebrews 5:11-6:8).

The author of Hebrews agrees with the uniform perspective of Biblical authors that God spoke the universe into a fully functioning system, including the sun, moon, stars, and earth. Before He spoke there was nothing. After He said these words, instantly what He commanded became. Note Psalm 33:6-9.

4. So that what is seen was not made, how? (v.3)

The word “**formed**” points toward earth as a finished product fully adequate for man’s temporary home. It was all formed **at God’s command**.

B. Faith Illustrated by Abel, Enoch, and Noah (11:4-7)

5. By what? Abel offered God a better what? Better than who did? (v.4)

Jesus put Abel at the head of the list of righteous people whom the Jews had killed in their resistance of God’s invitations to them (Note Matthew 23:35; Luke 15:51). Abel is also the first hero of faith named in this list of Hebrews 11. His death, literally his blood, will be mentioned again in Hebrews 12:24 in contrast with the blood of Jesus to which all Christians have come.

6. By what? He was commended as a what? When God did what? (v.4)

7. And by what? He still does what? Even though he is what? (v.4)

God commended Abel as a righteous man because his faith led him to do what God asked to be done. His obedience is held up before us as an example to be copied even though it eventually cost him his life. This is why “he still speaks, even though he is dead.” One commentator writes: “Cain and Abel may have talked about what God required as a sacrifice before either of them brought his sacrifice. Let Abel’s determination to obey God whatever others would do be an encouragement to us.”

In the face of speculation about what made Abel’s sacrifice better than that of Cain, our text simply explains that it was because of his faith. There is no suggestion that God required an animal which Cain refused, or that Cain did not bring the best from what he had. The very anger of Cain upon having his offering refused indicates an arrogant distrust of God (Genesis 4:5). Cain knew better than God what he should offer! One man says, “Faith is so important that Paul could say whatever does not originate in faith is sin (Romans 14:23). Jesus explained to His disciples that the reason the Holy Spirit would convict people of sin was because they *did not believe* in Him (John 16:8-9). Disbelief is the central problem of sin. Belief is mandatory.” Our author of Hebrews waits till after his third illustration of faith to explain this same concept that without faith it is impossible to please God (11:6).

8. By what? Who was taken from this life? So that he did not do what? (v.5)

Enoch’s faith led to a most unusual blessing. He was “translated,” i.e., “taken from this life” without dying. The word “translate” literally means “to convey to another place.”

9. He could not be what? Why? (v.5)

“could not be found” – The idea is that the people kept looking for him.

10. For before what? He was commended as what? (v.5)

11. And without what? It is what? (v.6)

12. Because anyone who does what? Must believe what two? (v.6)

Two facets of faith are necessary for anyone to be able to come to God. (1) He must believe that God exists. (2) He must believe that God rewards those who earnestly seek Him. It would be reasonable to expect to find both of these traits in each example of faith laid before us.

“anyone who comes” & “those who earnestly seek” = both convey present tense concepts. This indicates continual coming and continual seeking. God does not respond to the occasional seeker. One must keep coming as a lifestyle. One must keep seeking as a regular, habitual predominant way of life. As one person writes, “A single cry never indicates the real nature of our heart. A perpetual cry does.”

13. By what? Who was warned about things not yet seen? (v.7)

When warned by God, Noah acted on things which could not be seen (cf. v.1). He trusted the truth of the message given him by God.

14. In what kind of fear? Did what? To save whom? (v.7)

God used “holy fear” to motivate Noah. It would result in saving his family. Maybe more need to be moved by “holy fear” so that they might be saved and that they might work harder to help save others.

Noah’s expression of faith consisted of a construction project. He built an ark, a huge boat 450 feet long. Until 1858 the largest boat besides the ark was the P&O liner called “Himalaya,” which was barely half as long as the ark! In that year Isambard Brunel launched the Great Eastern, 692 feet by 83 feet by 30 feet. This boat was five times the tonnage of any ship then afloat. It was another forty years before a boat was built bigger than the Great Eastern.

15. By his what? He did what to the world? (v.7)

Noah gave ample testimony to the Truth that the entrance of light always constitutes a judgment of the darkness that surrounds it.

16. And became what? Of the what? That comes how? (v.7)

Noah was the first man in Genesis to be called “righteous.” This verse reminds us that this righteousness came because he clung tenaciously to God. His was the righteousness that comes by faith. Noah acted on God’s word alone, without any other “evidence” of the impending flood.

Thus the text says that by faith Noah did three things: (1) he built an ark; (2) he condemned the world, and (3) he became heir of the righteousness that comes by faith.

“Making Disciples for the Master”