

The Book of Hebrews

מְאֹנְשׁ מִנְמָה דָא מִנְהָת אַקְלָא
צְמַאַלְלָא נְתַחְצְרָה דְרַחְסָנָה סָקָה
אַחֲ פְּקָלָא תְּסִנְ סְרְבָּאַלְלָה
רַרְתָּא סָקָה תְּאַקְסָנָה דְמַמְצָה
תְּאַתְּפָלָשָׁה נְתַרְדְּנָה הַרְפָּרָה נְרַלְדָה
תְּאַגְּשָׁה רַלְדָה מְלַלְצָה סָסָה תְּלָשָׁה



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Outline of Hebrews

2. The “Hall of Faith” – Description and Examples of Persevering Faith (11:1-12:3)
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Prologue: The Nature of Faith (11:1-3)

^{11:1} 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. 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 Faith of Those Prior to the Flood (11:4-7)

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

Introduction to the “Hall of Faith”

- Hebrews 11, often referred to as the great “Hall of Faith,” has become through the centuries one of the church’s most-loved portions of Scripture.
- Poetic in its cadence, panoramic in its historical sweep, and imminently relevant in its challenge, this chapter calls the believer to faithful endurance by use of voluminous testimony from the lives of ancient saints.
- In this passage the author challenges his hearers to live lives of faith and to follow the example of those who by faith were pleasing to God in ***their*** earthly pilgrimages.

Introduction to the “Hall of Faith”

- The author uses the phrase “by faith” repeatedly, reiterating the phrase over and over again, driving it into the hearers’ consciences like a poignant, monotonous melody.
- Through this literary tool the author focuses attention on the ***centrality*** of a life of faith for the people of God.
- In this section, the author holds up a list of examples – a rhetorical tool used by ancient authors to challenge hearers to action.
- The purpose of this method of persuasion is to impress the audience with ***extensive evidence*** that the desired course of action is indeed the best one to take.
- In the case of Hebrews 11 the author, through his list of biblical examples, provides ***strong support*** for his contention that God’s people ***must be*** people of faith— even in the face of disheartening difficulties.

11:1 *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 author begins this section by explaining the nature of faith, not by completely defining faith, but by explaining how faith works.
- “*Faith is*”, he says, the “*assurance of things [that are] hoped for.*”
- In other words, those who have faith are convinced that the unseen promises of God **will** be fulfilled.

11:1 *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.*

- Our author is making much the same point as Paul makes in Rom 8:24-25: *“For in this hope we were saved. Now hope that is **seen** is not hope. For who hopes for what he sees? But if we hope for what we do **not** see, we wait for it with patience.”*
- The word translated “*conviction*” has the same sense as “*assurance*” in the preceding phrase.
- *Physical* eyesight produces conviction or evidence of **visible** things; “*faith*” is what enables people (like Moses in Heb 11:27) to see the “*things not seen*”.

11:1 *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.*

- Faith and confidence in God's promises are important, for “*the people of old*” recorded in the OT “*received ... commendation*” from **God** for their faith.
- The author is about to give us a whole list of those “*people of old*” in the upcoming verses.
- The author's desire is that his readers would **imitate** the example of their illustrious ancestors so that they **too** would have God's commendation on the last day.

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.***

- This principle of faith grasping the reality of “*things not seen*” can be seen in our conviction that God created the world.
- We were not there when God created the universe.
- But as believers we “*understand*” and comprehend “*by faith*” that the world was “*created*” by the word of God.
- The author is, of course, is alluding here to Genesis 1 where God ***speaks*** and his “*word*” is effective in causing the things of the universe to come into existence.
- We find a similar idea in Ps 33:6 – “*By the word of the LORD the heavens were made.*”

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.**

- Furthermore, our author tells us, it is “*by faith*” that we know that “*what is seen was not made out of things that are visible*”.
- Philosophers in that day believed that the world had been fashioned out of formless matter.
- The writer to the Hebrews is more biblical in his reasoning and affirms the doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo* (“creation out of nothing”), a doctrine that didn’t fit in with much of the thinking in his day.
- The “*faith*” here is faith in the ***divine revelation***.
- Undoubtedly the first chapter of Genesis is on in his mind, since he is about to give us seven examples of faith from people mentioned in subsequent chapters of that book.

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

- The first example of faith that our author finds in the biblical record is “*Abel*”.
- According to the narrative of Gen. 4:3-5, “*Abel*” and his elder brother “*Cain*” both brought offerings to God:
 - Abel, since he was a *shepherd*, brought “*of the firstborn of his flock and of their fat portions.*”
 - Cain, the *agriculturalist*, brought “*an offering of the fruit of the ground.*”
- In each case, the offering presented was suitable to the offeror's *vocation*; yet “*the LORD had regard for Abel and his offering, but for Cain and his offering he had no regard.*”
- Why was there this discrimination?

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

- When Cain saw that his offering was *disregarded*, he became “*very angry*” and his “*face fell*” (Gen 4:5)
- But God pointed out to Cain a way by which he *could* be accepted: “*If you do well, will you not be accepted? And if you do not do well, sin is crouching at the door. Its desire is for you, but you must rule over it.*” (Gen 4:7).
- This idea is quite in line with the later prophetic teaching about sacrifice – sacrifice is acceptable to God *not* for its *material* content, but insofar as it is the outward expression of a devoted and obedient *heart*.
- Let Cain “*rule over*” the sin which threatens to be his undoing, and his sacrifice will be accepted as readily as Abel's was.

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

- Since Cain was told that he would be accepted *if* he did well, it follows that Abel was accepted *because* he did well – in other words, because he was “*righteous*”.
- And, in fact, the righteousness of Abel is emphasized *elsewhere* in the New Testament:
 - Jesus refers to “*the blood of righteous Abel*” (Mat 23:35 – NIV)
 - John tells us that Cain killed Abel “*because his own deeds were evil and his brother's righteous*” (1 John 3:12).
- Here our author says that **God** “*commended [Abel] as righteous... by accepting his gifts.*”
- This echoes what we see in Gen 4:4, “*the LORD had regard for Abel and his offering*”

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

- The abiding principle of Scripture in this regard is summed up in the words of Prov 15:8, “*The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination to the LORD, but the prayer of the upright is acceptable to him.*”
- But how could the author know that it was “*by faith*” that Abel brought God a more acceptable sacrifice than his brother?
- After all, the text of Genesis doesn’t *specifically* say that.

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

- God's regard for Abel's gift demonstrates that Abel himself was a "**righteous**" man.
- The passage in Habakkuk cited by the author in Heb 10:38 teaches that those who are **righteous** live **by faith**: "*my righteous one shall live by faith.*"
- Therefore we have every reason to assume that Abel **lived "by faith"**.
- Furthermore, the principle found in Heb 11:6 tells us that "*without faith it is impossible to please [God]*"
- Since God was **pleased** with Abel's offering we have every reason to assume that Abel's "*acceptable sacrifice*" was offered to God "**by faith**".

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

- And, the author tells us, Abel “*by faith*” **continues** to speak, even in **death**.
- When God accused Cain of Abel's murder, he said: “*The voice of your brother's blood is crying to me from the ground*” (Gen 4:10).
- Our author's point appears to be that Abel is still appealing to God for vindication, until he obtains it in full in the final judgement.
- There is a similar idea found in Rev 6:9-11, where the souls of the martyrs cry aloud for vindication, and are told that they must wait “*until the number of their fellow servants and their brothers should be complete*”.

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

- As the first of many who “*died in faith, not having received the things promised*” (Heb 11:13), Abel heads the chorus of witnesses who speak from Scripture’s pages, testifying, even as their blood is shed (Heb 11:35-37), that the God who **promises** is **faithful** (Heb 11:11).
- Abel is among the “*spirits of the righteous made perfect*,” assembled to worship in the heavenly Jerusalem (Heb 12:23).
- These faithful sufferers of old set the pace for those who hear this sermon-letter now, whose struggle against sin has not yet reached the point of bloodshed (Heb 12:4).
- These ancient saints were privileged to serve as “previews” of faith’s founder and perfecter, Jesus, who endured execution on the cross for his people (Heb 12:2).

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.*

- If, in Abel, faith speaks through a **dead man**, in Enoch, it speaks through one who **never died**.
- The ESV's threefold use of the word “*taken*” in this verse, literally means “translated,” that is, conveyed from one realm to another.
- Genesis has very little to say about Enoch, but there is a good deal written about him in extra-biblical Jewish literature.
- Twice in the Hebrew text it says that Enoch “*walked with God*” (Gen. 5:22 and 24), which in the **Septuagint** is translated as “*he pleased God*.”

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.*

- The author picks up this idea that Enoch “*pleased God*” (undoubtedly from the Septuagint) and uses it both here and in the following verse.
- The words “*he was not found, because God had taken him*”, are a quotation from the Septuagint translation of Genesis 5:24.
- This reference to the “taking” or translation of Enoch directly from this world into the next, made him, like Elijah, a very special figure in Jewish eschatology, wherein he was expected to appear again as one of God’s special envoys.

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.**

- The important thing for our author is **not** the miraculous translation of Enoch (though he mentions it three times) but rather the statement about Enoch having “**pleased God**” (**contrast** this with Heb 10:38: “*my soul has no pleasure in [the one who shrinks back]*”).
- And so, without providing any further detailed information, our author emphasizes the fact that Enoch “**pleased God**” and therefore had a genuine “**faith**” in God.
- And so, if we can say nothing else about Enoch, we can say this much: that his life was controlled by “**faith**” in the unseen reality of 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.

- Apart from faith neither Enoch nor anyone else could ever have been pleasing to God.
- The faith which our author has in mind embraces belief in the *invisible* spiritual realm, and belief in the *promises* of God which have not yet been fulfilled.
- Belief in the invisible spiritual realm involves, first and foremost, belief in him who is "*King of ages, immortal, invisible, the only God*" (1 Tim 1:17) – and belief in God *necessarily* carries with it a belief in his *word*.

*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.***

- It is not belief in the existence of *a* God that is meant, but belief in the existence of *the* God who once declared his will to the fathers through the prophets and in these “**last days**” has spoken in his *Son* (Heb 1:2).
- Those who approach him can do so in *full confidence* that he exists, that his word is true, and that he will never put off or disappoint the person who sincerely seeks him.
- For all that he has revealed of himself, whether through the prophets or in his Son, assures us that he is altogether **worthy** of his people's trust.

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.

- The ***reward*** desired by those who seek him is the joy of finding him; he himself self proves to be their “*exceeding joy*” (Ps 43:4).
- No doubt our author states this basic principle, as revealed by the record of Enoch, for the benefit and encouragement of his readers.
- The author has confidence that his readers desire to please God.
- But he insists, however, that they ***cannot*** please him apart from “*faith*” – the faith which not only believes that he ***exists*** but ***waits patiently*** and confidently for the reward promised to those who seek him.

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.*

- These first two “heroes” of faith stand at the extremes that their successors would experience: violent death (martyrdom), on the one hand, and a rare anticipation of resurrection life, on the other.
- This OT history of faith will close with a catalogue that transitions from a series of visible **victories** in life (Heb 11:33-35a) to a litany of **hardships and death**, endured in anticipation of a better resurrection to come (11:35b-38).

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.*

- The next example of faith illustrates this willingness to believe that when God promises something he will **certainly** bring it to pass.
- Like Abel, Noah was a righteous man; and like Enoch, he walked with God.
- But what is emphasized **here** is that when God announced that he would do something **unprecedented** in the lifetime of Noah and his contemporaries.
- Noah took God at his word, and began making practical preparations for the day when that word would come true.
- God told Noah that a flood would cover the entire earth.
- Such a catastrophe had never been known before, but Noah's **faith** supplied the proof of "*events as yet unseen*".

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.*

- The building of an ark far inland must have seemed absurd to Noah's neighbors; but when the flood occurred, his faith was vindicated and their unbelief was condemned: “*by [faith] he condemned the world*”.
- Noah paid careful attention to God's instructions and began to prepare the means by which he and his household would be kept safe when the flood came.
- And so Noah became a living example of the truth the author previously cited: “*my righteous one will live by faith*” (Heb 10:38).
- And so he says here, “*Noah... became an heir of the righteousness that comes by faith*”.

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.*

- In other places in the New Testament the flood of Noah's day is an illustration of sudden judgment, a foreshadowing of the second coming of Christ (Cf. Matt 24:37-39; Luke 17:26ff).
- Noah's safe passage through the waters which overwhelmed others is a figure of Christian baptism (1 Pet 3:20ff).
- Noah himself is described as a preacher of righteousness. (2 Pet 2:5)

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.**

- But what the author emphasizes *here* is Noah's ***faith***, and it cannot be said that our author had to look far to discover faith in the Old Testament story of Noah.
- Noah is the first person in the OT to whom the great gospel terms “***righteousness***” and “***grace***” are applied, and the quality of his “***faith***” was proved by his prompt obedience: “*Noah ... did all that God commanded him.*” (Gen 6:22).
- And so Noah becomes another example of what God expects from us!

Class Discussion Time



*Class Discussion Time

- One of the big ideas that comes at us again and again as we looked through this text this morning is that our day to day lives should be an outward demonstration that:
 - We believe in an unseen reality that impacts our thoughts and our behavior throughout the day and throughout the week.
 - We must live our lives so as to please an unseen God who has promised an eternal reward to those believe in him and seek to obey his word in all that we do.
- I once heard a question that might be helpful ponder as we consider how the ideas put forth in today's text are, or perhaps should be, an influence in how we are living our lives: "If you were accused of being a Christian would there be enough evidence to convict you?"
- As we think about a response to that question, a good place to start might be to describe how you think your life would be different if you were **not** a Christian?