

LESSON 11

TRIUMPHS OF FAITH

“By faith” opens eighteen statements in Hebrews 11. These tell of people who resisted temptation, persecution, and heartbreak while keeping their trust in God. The focus is on those who “gained approval through their faith” (v. 39). The Old Testament relates the stories of men and women who regulated their whole lives by God’s promises. They believed what He said to them, even though some of the blessings of which He spoke were far in the future. Often His promises concerned things they could scarcely dream of, things they would not live to see; yet they still accepted them as real. Their faith counted for “sight.”

A DESCRIPTION OF FAITH (11:1)

The essence of faith in this chapter is simply taking God at His word. This verse contains a description of faith rather than a definition of the word.

1. What are the two main words that describe faith?
2. Which definition of “faith” do you find the most accurate and the most personally useful?
3. Is “faith” the same thing as “proof”?

A DEMONSTRATION OF FAITH (11:2, 3)

Christians, by faith, comprehend that a divine mind and power created our world. Verse 3 gives a good example of things not seen, for no one saw the creation occur. We need not boast of certainty regarding any theory as to how it happened.

4. How is the creation account described in verse 3c?

A PORTRAIT OF RIGHTEOUS MEN (11:4–7)

At this point in his narrative on faith, the author included a section on righteous individuals in the Old Testament. He began with Abel, Enoch, and Noah (vv. 4, 5, 7). Then he followed with a list of those who journeyed obediently in faith: Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Sarah (vv. 8–16). A third group concerns those who were tested by suffering, including Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, and Moses (vv. 17–28).

5. How are we to view Abel's faith in relation to Cain's?
6. What are some reasons that a person must "believe in God" (v. 6)?
7. How is Noah a good example of having faith in things not seen?

THE FATHER (AND MOTHER) OF THE FAITHFUL (11:8–12)

Faith acts. In the examples given in 11:4–7, faith was expressed through worshiping God, walking with God, and working on an ark in view of the coming of a great flood. Now, in connection with Abraham and Sarah, we will see that faith trusts in God. Indeed, in the midst of unusual circumstances, faith looks to God for the fulfillment of His promises.

8. For what choices is Abraham commended in his faith?
9. What is suggested about the basis for Sarah's faith?

THESE WERE FAITHFUL, THOUGH NOT HAVING RECEIVED GOD'S PROMISE (11:13–16)

In 11:13–16, a portrait is given to depict the traits of the person who truly walks by faith. This walk goes beyond a commitment to a lifestyle; it is a way of living that results in a journey by faith to the end of life.

10. What was the blessing that Abraham received for his faith?

FAITHFUL MEN WHO WERE TESTED BY SUFFERING (11:17–29)

Abraham knew that God was in control of both life and death. Isaac, who had received the patriarchal blessing from his father, was likewise

empowered to bless his sons. Jacob's sons were able to look back to prophecies that had foretold their future. We see in the brief reference to Moses' parents the elements of a strong, enduring faith in God. It was a faith that saw the possibilities offered by God, a faith that dared to act in spite of the king's edict, and a faith that trusted in God's providence.

The faith of Moses' parents became his faith as he grew. The text mentions five different instances of Moses' faithfulness.

11. How does the faith that Abraham had in offering Isaac make your faith stronger?
12. How does the faith of Isaac and Jacob differ from the faith of Abraham (in their application rather than in their quality)?
13. In what ways did Moses' parents demonstrate faith (v. 23)?
14. What was Moses denying when he put his faith in God?

ISRAEL'S FAITH AND RAHAB'S (11:30, 31)

The faith of Israel is reaffirmed in the great experiences connected with the conquering of the Promised Land. This episode depicts the nation of Israel as joining together in a united faith to do what God commanded.

15. Describe the acts of faith by Israel and by Rahab at the time the walls of Jericho fell.

TRIUMPHANT HEROES AND SUFFERING HEROES OF FAITH (11:32-38)

Old Testament heroes are presented in three groupings, beginning in verse 32. The first group names triumphant heroes who won military victories or were delivered from serious dangers (vv. 32-34). The second pertains to suffering heroes (vv. 35-38). The third, a concluding statement (vv. 39, 40), binds together all the faithful of the ages. Without Christ's church, none of these could be "made perfect." Victory was achieved through Christ our Lord for them and for us.

16. How did the judges live out their faith (v. 32)?
17. How can you relate the great deeds done by these heroes of faith to your own life?

A SUMMARY OF ALL THE FAITHFUL (11:39, 40)

The Old Testament heroes of faith did not receive the ultimate promise while they were alive. We live now in the age of divinely fulfilled promises. Only the resurrection at the end of the world waits beyond this, followed by eternity. From Abel onward, those named and unnamed in chapter 11 obtained a good reputation for faithfulness; that in itself was a fine reward.

18. What was the reward of the heroes of faith, since the promise of Christ had not yet been fulfilled during their lives?