

Hebrews 11

Lesson 11 Examples Of Faith

Outline

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- A. *These did not received the promise* (v. 39)
- B. *God provided something better for us* (v. 40)

Key Verses that Summarizes the Chapter

Hebrews 11:39-40

And all these, having obtained a good testimony through faith, did not receive the promise,
God having provided something better for us, that they should not be made perfect apart from us.

This chapter naturally flows out of the last part of chapter 10 where the writer urged his reader to hold on to the promises of God (vv. 35-39). There he told them not to cast away their confidence (v. 35), but keep on believing to the saving of the soul (v. 39). Here, we see examples of faith and see its power. "People of faith, because of the nature of faith itself, do not quit."¹ Thus, these great heroes of faith become the "cloud of witness" (12:1) that cheer us on as we run our own race.

The Nature of Faith (vv. 1-3)

Before looking at the examples, our author treats us to an understanding of the nature of faith. When one sees what faith is, what it does and its power (exemplified), he better appreciates the need for holding on to his own faith.

What it is (v. 1). While this verse is not a dictionary definition of faith, it defines faith nonetheless by describing what faith does. "There is scarcely any verse of the New Testament more important than this, for it states what is the nature of all true faith, and is the only definition of it which is attempted in the Scriptures."²

The substance of things hoped for. "*Substance*, as used by these translators, is *substantial nature*; the real nature of a thing which underlies and supports its outward form or properties."³ It is "what stands under anything (a building, a contract, a promise)."⁴ When the Christian has hope "beneath that anticipation lies a firm belief or trust that the thing not yet possessed actually exists and that its possession is certainly attainable."⁵

"Assurance" (ASV, ESV) gives the idea being expressed. Through faith, we can be sure of the things we hope for. Perhaps this is parallel to the phrase, "He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him" (v. 6).

Evidence of things not seen. "The word often signifies a process of proof or demonstration. So yon Soden: 'a being convinced. Therefore not a rash, feebly-grounded hypothesis,

1 David McClister, *A Commentary on Hebrews*, 380.

2 Albert Barnes, *Notes on the New Testament: Hebrews*, (R. Frew, Ed.), 248. London: Blackie & Son.

3 M. R. Vincent, *Word Studies in the New Testament*, 4:510. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons.

4 A. T. Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament* (Heb 11:1). Nashville, TN: Broadman Press.

5 McClister, *ibid*, 382.

a dream of hope, the child of a wish."⁶ "Conviction" (ASV, ESV) or "confidence" (NKJV fn) gives the idea being expressed. Faith involves "being convinced of what we do not see."⁷ What he doesn't see would include God himself as well as the eternal home (cf. 2 Cor. 4:18). Perhaps the phrase, "believe that he is" (v. 6) would be parallel.

While the Christian does not see his eternal home, he is just as convinced of its reality as if he had already received it. "It is in this sense of 'confidence' or boldness that our author says that faith serves as a kind of proof"⁸ of things not seen.

"Together the two statements in this verse define faith as something that connects the present to the future."⁹ Perhaps this translation summarizes the points being made, "Faith means being sure of the things we hope for and knowing that something is real even if we do not see it" (NCV).

The power of faith (vv. 2-3). By faith the elders (those listed in this chapter) obtained a good testimony ("received their commendation" ESV).¹⁰ By faith we understand that the worlds (universe, ESV) were created by the word of God. What we see now did not come from matter that already existed. By faith we are able to understand something that we did not see – the creation of the universe. We understand because we believe what God said (Gen. 1-2).

Examples of Faith and its Power (vv. 4-38)

Abel (v. 4). Abel offered the firstborn of his flock while Cain brought an offering of the fruit of the ground (Gen. 4:3-5). The Lord was pleased with Abel's sacrifice and not Cain's. The difference was that Abel offered his sacrifice "by faith" which means he followed the direction of God.¹¹ Because of his faith, he was declared to be righteous. Even though Abel is dead, he still speaks today through his example of faith.

Enoch (vv. 5-6). Enoch (like Elijah, 2 Kings 2:17) did not die, but was taken into heaven. The record is found in Genesis 5:24 which is quoted here. Before his translation, he had testimony that he pleased God.¹² Pleasing God is impossible without faith (v. 6), thus Enoch had faith.

One who comes to God must believe that he exist and believe he rewards those who diligently seek him (v. 6).¹³ This is the faith that is required to sustain the Hebrews and us as well.

Noah (v. 7). By faith Noah built the ark because he was warned of God about the flood and destruction that he could not yet see (Gen. 6-9). At the time he was instructed to build the ark, this took great faith because there was no natural indication that such a flood would

6 M. R. Vincent, *ibid*.

7 *The NET Bible* (Heb 11:1). Biblical Studies Press.

8 McClister, *ibid*, 382.

9 McClister, *ibid*, 382.

10 Compare this verse with verse 39 where the author tell us who the elders were by pointing back to "all these" just mentioned.

11 This is because faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word of God (Rom. 10:17).

12 He walked with God (Gen. 5:24).

13 Here we see there is a difference in believing *in* God and *believing* God.

occur. There had never been one before. Because of his faith he condemned the world (by his example)¹⁴ and was counted among the righteous.

Abraham (vv. 8-10, 12-19). No greater example of faith can be found than that of Abraham. Three things are stated in these verses that he did by faith: obeyed, believed, and sacrificed.

Obeyed (went to a country) (vv. 8-10). God called Abraham and told him to leave his home and travel to a far country where he had never been (Gen. 12:1-4). He obeyed! The reason he was able to be satisfied in a foreign land (v. 9) was that he looked toward a better and permanent home in heaven (v. 10).

Believed the promise (vv. 11-12). God told Abraham and Sarah that they would have a child even though both were very aged (Gen. 15:5-6; 17:1, 15-19; 18:9-15). Abraham believed the promise being fully convinced that God would do what he said (Rom. 4:16-21). Though Abraham was as good as dead (because of his age), a great multitude came from him (v. 12).

Sacrificed his son (vv. 17-19). Perhaps Abraham's greatest test of faith was when God told him to sacrifice his son Isaac (Gen. 22:1-19). Isaac was the one through whom God promised the seed (v. 18; Gen. 21:12). Abraham attempted to sacrifice his son thinking that God could raise him from the dead to fulfill his promise. When God prevented him from killing his son, Abraham figuratively received him from the dead (v. 19).

Sarah (v. 11). Like Abraham, Sarah believed the promise of a son. Though she was well past child bearing years, she was able to have a son because she trusted God who promised a son.

These all died in faith looking for a better country (vv. 13-16). "These" (those listed in verses 4-12) died with great faith even though they did not see the fulfillment of the promises made to them (v. 13). By faith they were able to see the fulfillment, though it was far off (v. 13). They considered themselves as pilgrims and strangers which implies they were looking for a better (heavenly) country (vv. 14, 16). If they had considered the land God had given Abraham the fullness of the promises of God, they might have gone back to the Ur of the Chaldees. They certainly had opportunity. They didn't for they set their eyes toward heaven. Such faith pleased God (v. 16b).

Isaac (v. 20). Isaac blessed Jacob and Esau (Gen. 27:26-40). The point here is not about how Jacob deceived Isaac and took away the blessing intended for Esau, but how Isaac looked by faith to the future fulfillment of the blessing he pronounced.

Jacob (v. 21). The author refers to two events near the end of Jacob's life where his faith looked to the future. He first mentions Jacob blessed the sons of Joseph, Manasseh and Ephraim (Gen. 48:1-22). Again the details are not the point here, but the fact that in the blessing Jacob's faith in God's fulfillment in the future is seen. The second event (Gen. 47:27-31) is when Joseph swore to his father that he would not bury him in Egypt. Jacob's faith is seen in his bowing in worship (Gen. 47:31).¹⁵

14 Compare Matthew 12:41-42.

15 "Leaning on the top of his staff" is taken from the LXX translation of Genesis 47:31. The word could be staff or bed.

Joseph (v. 21). Joseph, because he was fully persuaded that the people of God would come into the land that was promised, made his brethren swear they would bring his bones with them (Gen. 50:24).

Moses (vv. 23-29). There are five points that are given here about Moses, all of which point to the power of faith.

1. Was hid three months (v. 23). This verse speaks of the faith of Moses' parents who were seeking to save Moses' life through their confidence in God (Exo. 2:2).

2. Chose the people of God (vv. 24-26). When Moses became of age,¹⁶ he faced the choice of remaining with the Egyptians (as the son of Pharaoh's daughter) and enjoy the riches of Egypt or suffer with the people of God.¹⁷ He chose the latter because his faith looked to the reward.

3. Forsook Egypt (v. 27). Moses fled from Egypt and went to Midian after he killed the Egyptian (Exo. 2:11-25). Though Moses did have fear (Exo. 2:14), he overcame that fear and endured for his faith focused on God (whom he could not see) rather than the king he could see.

4. Kept the Passover (v. 28). When the Passover was instituted (Exo. 12:1-28), God required that blood be sprinkled on the doorpost lest the firstborn should be killed. This required faith in two ways. First, they believed God that the firstborn were going to die. Second, they believed that putting blood on the door would keep their firstborn from dying.¹⁸ Moses kept the Passover because he had faith.

5. Passed through the Red Sea (v. 29). Because of faith, Moses and the children of Israel were able to pass through the Red Sea on dry ground (Exo. 14:22). It took faith to walk between the walls of water on either side. The reference to the Egyptians drowning shows the effects of not having faith.

Walls of Jericho (v. 30). The city of Jericho was taken in the conquest because Joshua and the people of God had faith to do what God said (Josh. 6).

Rahab (v. 31). Rahab was spared from the destruction of Jericho because of her faith. When she hid the spies, she stated her faith in God (Josh. 2:9-11).

Other examples in general (vv. 32-39). Here the author groups many other examples of faith together for time and space would not permit details about each one. He mentions Gideon (Jud. 6-8), Barak (Jud. 4-5), Samson (Jud. 13-16), Jephthah (Jud. 11-12), David (1 Sam. 16-31; 2 Sam.), and Samuel (1 Sam. 1-25) by name. Then the author gives a long list of things that were either accomplished or endured through faith. Space in this little work will not permit comment on each expression. However, we list just four. Some stopped the

16 Forty years old (Acts 7:23).

17 This suffering is called "the reproach of Christ" (v. 26) because Christ and his followers have suffered the same type of reproach (insult, disgrace). Every follower of Christ is faced with the same choice that Moses faced.

18 McClister, *ibid.*, 418.

mouths of lions (Jud. 14:6; 1 Sam. 17:34; Dan. 6:22), quenched the violence of fire (Dan. 3:25), received their dead raised to life (1 Kings 17:22; 2 Kings 4:35-37) and sawn in two.¹⁹

We Have Something Better (vv. 39-40)

These did not receive the promise (v 39). All those that are either mentioned or alluded to in this chapter received a good report because of their faith. However, they did not live to see the fulfillment of the promise of the Messiah.

God provided something better for us (v. 40). The something better would be the better covenant, better priesthood and better sacrifice. Through the better things that we have in Christ, these Old Testament worthies can be made perfect (complete forgiveness) along with us.²⁰

Use of the Old Testament in this Chapter	
Verse in Chapter 11	Old Testament Reference
v. 5	Gen. 5:24
v. 18	Gen. 21:12

¹⁹ Jewish tradition says Isaiah was sawn in two.

²⁰ See Hebrew 9:15 and Romans 3:25.

Questions

1. How does chapter 11 relate to chapter 10?
2. What does "substance of things hoped for" (v. 1) mean?
3. What does "evidence of things not seen" (v. 1) mean?
4. How does one's faith relate to creation (v. 2)?
5. What was the difference in the sacrifices offered by Cain and Abel?
6. What three things did Abraham do because of his faith?
7. What does "these all died in faith" (v. 13) mean?
8. What does "the reproach of Christ" (v. 26) mean?
9. Keeping the Passover (v. 28) required faith in what two ways?
10. For class discussion: How did faith work in the lives of all those mentioned in this chapter? How should that impact the Hebrews?