

Hebrews

Chapter Eleven

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Heb 11:1-3 Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.²For by it the men of old gained approval. ³By faith we understand that the worlds were prepared by the word of God, so that what is seen was not made out of things which are visible.

The author is not trying to define faith. Rather he is saying that faith will make real those things that cannot be measured or determined by any natural senses. There are realities for which one cannot have any justification or proof other than by using the gift of faith from God. God has created all realities: *Col 1:16 For by Him all things were created, both in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities-- all things have been created by Him and for Him.* Only Christians can have the assurance of the existence of the invisible things and they receive many derogatory judgments by people who cannot perceive those realities. Christians need to grasp the truth that people who are spiritually dead have no means of grasping the truths that are so easily perceived by God's people. Although Christians evangelize to the entire world no amount of great eloquence will convince a spiritually dead person of the truths of the basics of Christianity. God must first give people faith before they can perceive spiritual truths in the same way that a person must be able to utilize physical senses to perceive most material realities. The Greek word translated "conviction" is related to proof or test in that Christians use their faith to test all immaterial things. Physical eyesight gives a person conviction or evidence of things that can be seen physically. The faith of the Christian is a vital tool (some people call it an organ) to use in having assurance or conviction of the invisible such as concepts like eternal life that give such hope to the living of a physical life. Faith allows people to see beyond all visible phenomena and non-Christians are blind to such. Faith is thus the basis of all meaning in the Christian life.

The understanding of faith is essential to the proper living of the Christian life and even knowing that one is a Christian. I wrote an article on the subject: <http://livingtheology.com/Faith.htm> and I hope that some of you will take the time to read it for I think faith is the most misunderstood topic of Christianity. If someone thinks that faith is something that is developed internally then salvation is by works and such a faith could also be lost. But faith is a gift of God that allows the person to believe, trust, and obey God. It is not synonymous with trust but is the cause of someone being able to trust. We hear people say that they lost their faith but true faith cannot be "lost". Since God gives it to His people by His grace, faith cannot be lost. An excellent definition of faith is: "Faith is the enabling power of God." God gives faith to His children so that they are enabled to believe, trust, and obey Him.

The author of Hebrews continues in verse 2 and 3 to introduce what will be the content of most of this chapter. The author gives a series of examples of people using their faith and he sets them in historical sequence. The witnesses to the truths of God in the past understood the teachings of God by their faith. The faith of these forefathers of the faith will be elaborated upon as the chapter proceeds. The author of Hebrews lifts up this essential element that only God's chosen people possess: faith.

In verse 3 he includes himself among those who have the God-given ability to "see" and understand the true creation of God in its fullest. Faith is the possession of all of God's people from the past, present and future. Faith allows us to understand that the word of God created all that exists out of what did not exist previously. The "worlds" includes all space, time, and matter as well as the invisible creations of God. This statement is in alignment with chapter one of Genesis as we read repeatedly "And God said". The Greek word translated "word" in verse 3 is "rhema" and not "logos" so this is a particular utterance of God that caused something to be created. Such was also stated by the psalmist:

Psalm 33:6 By the word of the Lord the heavens were made, And by the breath of His mouth all their host.

Psalm 33:9 For He spoke, and it was done; He commanded, and it stood fast.

General and specific revelations are from God and they cannot be in conflict. The conflict only comes when we improperly interpret one or the other. Only the person who has been given faith can properly merge the two revelations into one understanding of the invisible God and Creator. By science one obtains information about the physical universe but that data needs to be properly understood by also using faith. Only by faith can one understand specific revelation of the Word of God. The person who is a Christian and a scientist has the tools necessary to probe the truths of all creation (visible and invisible). However God reserves truths that even a person of faith cannot probe: *Deut 29:29 "The secret things belong to the Lord our God, but the things revealed belong to us and to our sons forever, that we may observe all the words of this law.* The things revealed from God are by faith and by physical senses so the non-Christian lacks some ability needed to understand those revelations.

Heb 11:4 By faith Abel offered to God a better sacrifice than Cain, through which he obtained the testimony that he was righteous, God testifying about his gifts, and through faith, though he is dead, he still speaks.

Now the author proceeds to relate how some of God's chosen people used the faith given them by God. He selects some of the people that would have been well known among his Jewish audience but we cannot know why he chose some and omitted others. The emphasis is on the faith from God (His enabling power) so the praise is to be directed not at the people chosen but

at God. He begins with people who lived in antiquity even far before the flood and certainly far before the time of Jesus Christ on earth. This first example is from Gen 4:3-7. Many suggestions have been made as to why Abel's sacrifice was better than that of Cain. Of course the judge as to which is better is God so we have to understand the basis for Abel being able to please God. A sacrifice to God is only acceptable if it is an outward expression of a devoted and obedient heart. We read in Matt 23:35 and 1 John 3:12 that Abel was a righteous man:

Matt 23:35 that upon you may fall the guilt of all the righteous blood shed on earth, from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zechariah, the son of Berechiah, whom you murdered between the temple and the altar.

1John 3:12 not as Cain, who was of the evil one, and slew his brother. And for what reason did he slay him? Because his deeds were evil, and his brother's were righteous.

We also know from the NT that this righteousness can only come from double imputation and the giving of faith. Since God testifies as to the acceptability of Abel's offering because of his faith, the work by faith of Abel still speaks to everyone today. Jude also tells us more about Cain:

Jude 1:11 Woe to them! For they have gone the way of Cain, and for pay they have rushed headlong into the error of Balaam, and perished in the rebellion of Korah.

I have often called Cain's attempt at the worship of God to be the first cult for it is an improper worship. God can only be worshipped according to the ways He states.

Many people have spent time trying to explain why Cain's sacrifice was not acceptable to God and they tend to focus on the sacrifice itself. However the real reason is that Cain's heart was hard. 1 John 3:12 states that his deeds were evil and that Abel's deeds were righteous. People can offer worship in ways not approved by God and suffer the consequences:

Num 3:4 But Nadab and Abihu died before the Lord when they offered strange fire before the Lord in the wilderness of Sinai; and they had no children. So Eleazar and Ithamar served as priests in the lifetime of their father Aaron.

Lev 10:1-2 Now Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron, took their respective firepans, and after putting fire in them, placed incense on it and offered strange fire before the Lord, which He had not commanded them. ²And fire came out from the presence of the Lord and consumed them, and they died before the Lord.

People can also be following directions of holy living as perfectly as possible but without the right heart and suffer the consequences. The Pharisees devoted their lives to perfectly obeying the Law but Jesus called them hypocrites, blind guides, fools, inwardly full of lawlessness, like white-washed tombs, serpents, and a brood of vipers (Matt 23). Speaking to some Jews, Jesus said that they were of their father, the devil (John 8:44). So if Cain had made the same sacrifice made by Abel but with his hard heart, God would have also condemned the offering of Cain. Thus we can come up with many reasons for Cain's sacrifice being unacceptable in itself such as not of blood and a fruit of the soil which God had cursed (Gen 3:17). But the true reason for the sacrifice being unacceptable was that Cain's heart was hard and he did not have faith as did Abel

(Heb 11:4). Similarly will be the result for people who regularly come to Sunday worship at a traditional service like at Midway but whose hearts are hard. “The heart of the matter is the matter of the heart”.

Heb 11:5 By faith Enoch was taken up so that he should not see death; and he was not found because God took him up; for he obtained the witness that before his being taken up he was pleasing to God.

Enoch was very popular in Jewish apocalyptic thought and several such books such as 1 Enoch are attributed to him but there is not much information about him in the OT aside from some genealogical information and from: *Gen 5:24 And Enoch walked with God; and he was not, for God took him.* The Hebrew bible tells us that Enoch was 65 years old when he became the father of Methuselah and that he lived another 300 years during which time he had other sons and daughters. In the NT, Jude informs us that Enoch was a prophet: *Jude 1:14 And about these also Enoch, in the seventh generation from Adam, prophesied, saying, "Behold, the Lord came with many thousands of His holy ones,*

We know that only Enoch and Elijah did not face death but were taken by God into heaven directly. This pleasure that God had for Enoch was because of the faith that God gave him and his showing of it by his prophesying and living for Him. Faith and righteousness are inseparable so Enoch was declared pleasing to God by virtue of his faith.

Heb 11:6 And without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who seek Him.

This verse makes it absolutely clear that faith is not an option for it is impossible to please God without faith, which comes from God. There are then two requirements of the worshipper. One is that he must believe that God is who He says that He is, which is only possible with faith as discussed after the first verse above since this is one of the invisible realities of the universe. The second is that the believer must know that God is a rewarder of those who seek Him.

The demons believe some things about God on an intellectual basis: *James 2:19 You believe that God is one. You do well; the demons also believe, and shudder.* However, only someone given faith can truly believe God as the Creator and Sustainer of the universe and all that is in it and know of His love for His children.

Nobody seeks God on his own initiative: *Rom 3:11 There is none who understands, There is none who seeks for God;* So the only ones who seek God are those who are drawn to Him by the Father: *John 6:44 "No one can come to Me, unless the Father who sent Me draws him; and I will raise him up on the last day.* A believer does not seek God to obtain rewards but this knowledge

about God shows an important characteristic of God in that He cares for His chosen people. A believer then patiently waits for the rewards that God has for him. Everyone will face judgment. Christians will not have a judgment of their righteousness because of the works of Jesus Christ. However Christians will face judgment of their works that are built upon the foundation laid by the Lord Jesus:

Rom 14:10 But you, why do you judge your brother? Or you again, why do you regard your brother with contempt? For we shall all stand before the judgment seat of God.

2Cor 5:10 For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may be recompensed for his deeds in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad.

1Cor 3:11-15 For no man can lay a foundation other than the one which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. ¹²Now if any man builds upon the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, ¹³each man's work will become evident; for the day will show it, because it is to be revealed with fire; and the fire itself will test the quality of each man's work. ¹⁴If any man's work which he has built upon it remains, he shall receive a reward. ¹⁵If any man's work is burned up, he shall suffer loss; but he himself shall be saved, yet so as through fire.

Heb 11:7 By faith Noah, being warned by God about things not yet seen, in reverence prepared an ark for the salvation of his household, by which he condemned the world, and became an heir of the righteousness which is according to faith.

Noah was personally warned by God of the impending destruction:

Gen 6:13 Then God said to Noah, "The end of all flesh has come before Me; for the earth is filled with violence because of them; and behold, I am about to destroy them with the earth.

Gen 6:17 "And behold, I, even I am bringing the flood of water upon the earth, to destroy all flesh in which is the breath of life, from under heaven; everything that is on the earth shall perish.

There were no physical signs of this coming flood but Noah reacted by faith to believe God and to obey His commands to prepare for saving some people and animals from the coming destruction. The sudden coming of the flood is a type of the second coming of the Lord Jesus Christ. He used his faith to believe God even though there had never been such a catastrophe and building an ark so far inland must have been viewed as absurd by those without faith. Some translations use “fear” instead of “reference” but reference is the best translation for there is no context for a reaction of fear by Noah. Some translations use “built” instead of “prepared” but the NAS translation is preferred because there was more to having the ark ready for its purpose than just building it. Salvation is mainly used in the NT to mean salvation in Christ but here it is used in context as to save Noah and his family for the coming physical destruction rather than a spiritual destruction. “The world” includes all of mankind who did not please God and so were condemned for all eternity.

Noah is the first person that the Bible declares to be righteous: *Gen 7:1 Then the Lord said to Noah, "Enter the ark, you and all your household; for you alone I have seen to be righteous before Me in this time.* We see the basis of one being declared righteous before God is always the same: faith.

Verse 6 stated clearly that it is only by faith that anyone can please God and the only people who can please God are those who are declared righteous so faith from God is the only means of pleasing God in righteousness. Peter stated that Noah was a preacher of righteousness: *2Peter 2:5 and did not spare the ancient world, but preserved Noah, a preacher of righteousness, with seven others, when He brought a flood upon the world of the ungodly;*

Heb 11:8 By faith Abraham, when he was called, obeyed by going out to a place which he was to receive for an inheritance; and he went out, not knowing where he was going.

The Jews prided themselves on being descendents of Abraham so it is natural that the author of Hebrews wrote more about him than the others. The author of Hebrews uses the name Abraham ten times in this book. Abraham is mentioned elsewhere in the NT as a person who had faith and acted upon it:

Acts 7:2-8 And he said, "Hear me, brethren and fathers! The God of glory appeared to our father Abraham when he was in Mesopotamia, before he lived in Haran, ³and said to him, 'Depart from your country and your relatives, and come into the land that I will show you.'⁴"Then he departed from the land of the Chaldeans, and settled in Haran. And from there, after his father died, God removed him into this country in which you are now living. ⁵"And He gave him no inheritance in it, not even a foot of ground; and yet, even when he had no child, He promised that He would give it to him as a possession, and to his offspring after him. ⁶"But God spoke to this effect, that his offspring would be aliens in a foreign land, and that they would be enslaved and mistreated for four hundred years. ⁷"And whatever nation to which they shall be in bondage I Myself will judge,' said God, 'and after that they will come out and serve Me in this place.'⁸"And He gave him the covenant of circumcision; and so Abraham became the father of Isaac, and circumcised him on the eighth day; and Isaac became the father of Jacob, and Jacob of the twelve patriarchs. Rom 4:3 For what does the Scripture say? "And Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness."

Gal 3:6 Even so Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness.

James 2:23 and the Scripture was fulfilled which says, "And Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness," and he was called the friend of God.

The Greek word translated “believed” is the verb form of the Greek word for “faith” and such usage means that the exercise of faith resulted in belief. Verse 8 clearly shows that Abraham acted on faith for he did not know where he was going but was perfectly willing to obey God and to go wherever He led him. The verse states that Abraham would receive this land as an

inheritance but it would only be so for his descendents for Abraham never directly received even a foot of the land (Acts 7:5) even though he saw it and was included in the promise:

Gen 12:7 And the Lord appeared to Abram and said, "To your descendants I will give this land." So he built an altar there to the Lord who had appeared to him.

Gen 13:14-15 And the Lord said to Abram, after Lot had separated from him, "Now lift up your eyes and look from the place where you are, northward and southward and eastward and westward; ¹⁵for all the land which you see, I will give it to you and to your descendants forever.

The Levites prayer of confession involved Abraham as stated by Nehemiah:

Neh 9:7-8 "Thou art the Lord God, Who chose Abram And brought him out from Ur of the Chaldees, And gave him the name Abraham. ⁸"And Thou didst find his heart faithful before Thee, And didst make a covenant with him To give him the land of the Canaanite, Of the Hittite and the Amorite, Of the Perizzite, the Jebusite, and the Girgashite-- To give it to his descendants. And Thou hast fulfilled Thy promise, For Thou art righteous.

Certainly his faith is proclaimed as he left his home and its familiarity to travel to a place not revealed to him when he left. The actual promise of the inheritance was not given to him until he had returned from Egypt and Lot had chosen a well-watered area of Jordan (Gen 13:14-17). The promise was confirmed to him with the promise of an heir (Gen 15:18-21) and again after the covenant involving circumcision (Gen 17:8).

Heb 11:9 By faith he lived as an alien in the land of promise, as in a foreign land, dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob, fellow heirs of the same promise; ¹⁰for he was looking for the city which has foundations, whose architect and builder is God.

After arriving in the Promised Land Abraham did not live there in a permanent house but in a tent as did his sons. The only piece of land Abraham ever owned was the property he bought to bury Sarah (Gen 23). Receiving the promise from God is the same for the man of faith as if it were already present. The land of Canaan was a foretaste of heaven, a shadow of the reality in which he would live forever with God. Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob were all heirs of God's promise but toward the end of Jacob's life the clan moved to Egypt and came back many years later when the people made the land their own. All Christians today should also view their life on earth as aliens in a foreign land for our citizenship is in heaven: *Phil 3:20 For our citizenship is in heaven, from which also we eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ;* Abraham lived there in faith as he knew that God had promised him a better place so that he did not need a permanent house in Canaan. The city to which he was looking has been called the heavenly Jerusalem. Saying that the city has foundations means that it is eternal in contrast to the earthly foundations of cities that will decay. God is the designer of the heavenly dwelling place and He is the One who created it according to His plans. The Bible also informs us of other foundations. We have already discussed the foundation of the world: *Heb 1:10 And, "Thou, Lord, in the*

beginning didst lay the foundation of the earth, And the heavens are the works of Thy hands; There is another foundation that is available for each believer to build upon: *1Cor 3:11 For no man can lay a foundation other than the one which is laid, which is Jesus Christ.* Each Christian will then be judged according to what he built upon that foundation as discussed above relating to Heb 11:6.

Heb 11:11-12 By faith even Sarah herself received ability to conceive, even beyond the proper time of life, since she considered Him faithful who had promised; ¹²therefore, also, there was born of one man, and him as good as dead at that, as many descendants as the stars of heaven in number, and innumerable as the sand which is by the seashore.

Some translators have struggled with verse 11 as it is difficult to interpret but the wording above from the NAS version seems the most logical. It is not teaching that Sarah was somehow made able to conceive on her own but rather that her reproductive system was activated to receive Abraham's semen and to bring about the birth of Isaac. She was initially doubtful and even laughed at the prospect of becoming pregnant for she was 90 years old and long past the normal age for childbearing:

Gen 18:11-14 Now Abraham and Sarah were old, advanced in age; Sarah was past childbearing. ¹²And Sarah laughed to herself, saying, "After I have become old, shall I have pleasure, my lord being old also?" ¹³And the Lord said to Abraham, "Why did Sarah laugh, saying, 'Shall I indeed bear a child, when I am so old?' ¹⁴"Is anything too difficult for the Lord? At the appointed time I will return to you, at this time next year, and Sarah shall have a son."

Because of her initial reactions to the possibility of becoming pregnant we can understand why the author of Hebrews wrote "even Sarah). But Sarah did receive faith from God and she did give birth to Isaac. From this man and woman who were both past the normal time of bearing children came the fulfillment of God's promise to Abraham that he would be the father of a multitude of nations (Gen 17:4) and Sarah would be a mother of nations (Gen 17:16). The reference to the number of stars and grains of sand is not a direct quotation from some specific OT passage but is reminiscent of some:

Gen 15:5 And He took him outside and said, "Now look toward the heavens, and count the stars, if you are able to count them." And He said to him, "So shall your descendants be."

Gen 22:17 indeed I will greatly bless you, and I will greatly multiply your seed as the stars of the heavens, and as the sand which is on the seashore; and your seed shall possess the gate of their enemies.

Exodus 32:13 "Remember Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, Thy servants to whom Thou didst swear by Thyself, and didst say to them, 'I will multiply your descendants as the stars of the heavens, and all this land of which I have spoken I will give to your descendants, and they shall inherit it forever.'"

Heb 11:13-16 All these died in faith, without receiving the promises, but having seen them and having welcomed them from a distance, and having confessed that they were strangers and exiles on the earth. ¹⁴For those who say such things make it clear that they are seeking a country of their own. ¹⁵And indeed if they had been thinking of that country from which they went out, they would have had opportunity to return. ¹⁶But as it is, they desire a better country, that is a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God; for He has prepared a city for them.

The author will return to Abraham but he now makes some general comments about people of faith and their focus on the heavenly city promised them. These saints received only a glimpse of the full promises to them such as Abraham receiving a son but even he did not receive all the promises of God. Moses prayed that God would allow him to enter the Promised Land (Deut 3:23-25) but God only allowed him to see it (Deut 3:26-28; 34:1-4). They utilized their faith that God would be faithful even if they did not receive the promises fully while living. They knew they were resident aliens as are all Christians. Christians are strangers in their physical homeland and they are outcasts (exiles) by the people who are citizens of that country. If we are not recognized by the world as strangers and exiles by mankind (those still spiritually dead) then something is wrong with our witness. None of the people described in this chapter as people of faith were afraid of mankind but rather feared God as later admonished by Jesus: *Matt 10:28 "And do not fear those who kill the body, but are unable to kill the soul; but rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.* These people clearly showed by their actions and words that they were not seeking a worldly city but a country made specifically for them ("of their own"). All the people of faith were not physically prevented from returning to whatever place they came from but their faith kept them pointed toward their Godly designation, whether or not they would actually totally receive it. People of true faith do not have a heart set on any earthly goals but rather on the spiritual goals and the heavenly city set for them by God. God was then not ashamed of them for they stayed true to their faith and God **prepared** a city for them (note the tense in that it is done). Several times God shows that He is not ashamed of some of these saints as He refers to Himself as "the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob". Jesus also made such a statement as He also stated that they still live: *Mark 12:26-27 "But regarding the fact that the dead rise again, have you not read in the book of Moses, in the passage about the burning bush, how God spoke to him, saying, 'I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob'? ²⁷"He is not the God of the dead, but of the living; you are greatly mistaken."*

Like the elect sojourners of the Dispersion that are to live in this world as "aliens and exiles": *1Peter 2:9-11 But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God's own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; ¹⁰for you once were not a people, but now you are the people*

of God; you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy. ¹¹Beloved, I urge you as aliens and strangers to abstain from fleshly lusts, which wage war against the soul.

Paul also referred to our true citizenship: *Phil 3:20-21 For our citizenship is in heaven, from which also we eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ; ²¹who will transform the body of our humble state into conformity with the body of His glory, by the exertion of the power that He has even to subject all things to Himself.*

This anticipation and certain hope drives us to live here more totally for Christ.

Heb 11:17-19 By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac; and he who had received the promises was offering up his only begotten son; ¹⁸it was he to whom it was said, "In Isaac your descendants shall be called." ¹⁹He considered that God is able to raise men even from the dead; from which he also received him back as a type.

Now the author returns to his discussion involving Abraham in particular. Here he mentions the greatest trial that could come upon a father. Abraham's greatest conflict was not in his obligation to God and his responsibility to his son but rather in reconciling the command to sacrifice Isaac and God's previous promises regarding his descendants. First there is the past tense (offered) followed by present tense (offering) as the author is stating that Abraham was complete in his obedience to God as the task was complete in his mind even as he was physically completing the task. In verse 18 the emphasis is that the promise of God to Abraham was specifically through Isaac and not through some other son that God may miraculously bring forth. Since Abraham knew that God was faithful he knew that even though he sacrificed his only son God could raise him from the dead. Even though he intended to do as God commanded, he had told his servants that he and Isaac would return: *Gen 22:5 And Abraham said to his young men, "Stay here with the donkey, and I and the lad will go yonder; and we will worship and return to you."* Since the author is writing after the resurrection of Jesus, he is probably stating that this event prefigured (was a type of) the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Abraham did receive Isaac back from the dead in a sense because he had determined to faithfully obey God and trust that God would be faithful to fulfill His promises to him. James also refers to this great act of faith by Abraham:

James 2:21-23 Was not Abraham our father justified by works, when he offered up Isaac his son on the altar? ²²You see that faith was working with his works, and as a result of the works, faith was perfected; ²³and the Scripture was fulfilled which says, "And Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness," and he was called the friend of God.

The conundrum facing Abraham was that God had promised a multitude of descendants from Abraham through Isaac and not Ishmael:

Gen 17:19-21 But God said, "No, but Sarah your wife shall bear you a son, and you shall call his name Isaac; and I will establish My covenant with him for an everlasting covenant for his descendants after him. ²⁰"And as for Ishmael, I have heard you; behold, I will bless him, and will make him fruitful, and will multiply him exceedingly. He shall become the father of twelve

princes, and I will make him a great nation. ²¹ *"But My covenant I will establish with Isaac, whom Sarah will bear to you at this season next year."*

But God had also commanded Abraham to sacrifice Isaac: *Gen 22:2 And He said, "Take now your son, your only son, whom you love, Isaac, and go to the land of Moriah; and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains of which I will tell you."*

So how could Abraham reconcile these seemingly opposite statements from God? Abraham viewed the situation as a problem for God and so had faith that God would resolve the issue. The problem was above his pay grade! Abraham indeed had great faith from God. We should similarly approach problems in our life. If it seems that we have to lie to protect someone rather than tell the truth that would seem to result in great tragedy we need to trust God to handle His promises.

Heb 11:20 By faith Isaac blessed Jacob and Esau, even regarding things to come.

Some Jewish writings refer to the faith of Isaac in allowing himself to be bound for sacrifice by his father but the author does not refer to that episode but relates only this action of faith. According to Josephus, Isaac was 25 years old at the time of the sacrifice and so could have resisted Abraham. The faith of these people looked forward beyond death. It was when Isaac thought that he was near death that he blessed Jacob and Esau (Gen 27:2, 4). He mentions the blessings of the sons not in the order of their birth but in the order of their receiving the blessings. The author does not go into details like the deception of Isaac by Jacob for that is not his interest at this point in his narrative. He is showing the great faith of Isaac and his trust in God for whatever will happen. Isaac did quickly recognize that the blessing belonged to Jacob (Gen 27:33) and later specifically blessed Jacob with complete knowledge of his actions (Gen 28:1-4) and this is the time when he showed his faith in accepting the previous actions even though through deception by those involved. God is sovereign even in the sinful actions of people.

Heb 11:21 By faith Jacob, as he was dying, blessed each of the sons of Joseph, and worshiped, leaning on the top of his staff.

Jacob is included in this listing of people of great faith because of his blessings of Ephraim and Manasseh (Gen 48). Again the blessing went against the natural order of birthright. Joseph tried to have the greater blessing given to his firstborn, Manasseh, but Jacob crossed his hands when doing the blessing. God does not make His choices based upon any human regulations but only according to His will. The author speaks of Jacob exhibiting a worshipful attitude by leaning on the top of his staff while making the blessings. The patriarch is sitting on his bed and leaning on his staff in a worshipful manner as he is acting out his faith from God.

Heb 11:22 By faith Joseph, when he was dying, made mention of the exodus of the sons of Israel, and gave orders concerning his bones.

The application of the faith of Joseph also looked beyond his death. Joseph only spent his first 17 years in Canaan and the remainder of his time in Egypt but he regarded the promise of God as paramount and wanted his bones to rest in the land to which he could not return. Making reference to the exodus showed his faith that God would complete His task of bringing His people to the Promised Land. Joseph had spent all but the first 17 years of his life in Egypt but he had faith that God would move His people to that promised land and he acted on that faith by requesting that his bones be buried in that land when the people went there (Gen 50:24). One author, M. Wilcox, interprets the situation as Joseph not only looking forward to the exodus of Moses but also to the final liberation by the Redeemer.

Heb 11:23-26 By faith Moses, when he was born, was hidden for three months by his parents, because they saw he was a beautiful child; and they were not afraid of the king's edict. ²⁴By faith Moses, when he had grown up, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter; ²⁵choosing rather to endure ill-treatment with the people of God, than to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin; ²⁶considering the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt; for he was looking to the reward.

The origin of the Law was paramount in the eyes of the Jews and Moses was the great lawgiver so he was a person greatly esteemed by them. His achievements are far amplified by some Jewish writers. Josephus describes a victorious battle he led against the Ethiopians as Egyptian commander-in-chief. Philo credits him with proficiency in arithmetic, geometry, poetry, music, philosophy, astrology, and all branches of education. Eupolemus, a Hellenistic Jewish writer, says that he invented the alphabet. Others give credits to Moses in different areas. Stephen gives his career in a less grandiose manner (Acts 7:20-44) but he does say that Moses was educated in all the wisdom of the Egyptians. Stephen puts more emphasis on Moses as God's appointed messenger and redeemer to the people of Israel. Although the author greatly admired Moses, he would not lift him up to the extent done by the Jews who generally regarded Moses higher than Abraham. The Christians would see Moses rather as one who followed in the spiritual footsteps of Abraham.

The author gives five instances of the exercise of faith by Moses. He begins his elaboration on the faith of Moses with the **(1)** faith of his parents. The king had commanded that every male Hebrew child would be thrown into the Nile (Exodus 1:22) but the parents had faith that God had a special plan for their son and they hid him for three months. His mother then placed him so that he would be found by Pharaoh's daughter. Josephus writes that Moses' father, Amram, was given a divine revelation of the importance of his son. The next act of faith **(2)** was by Moses in his refusal to be totally identified as the son of Pharaoh's daughter. Stephen tells us that Moses

was about 40 years old at this time (Acts 7:23). Moses was a mature man who had lived in an aristocratic family and could have continued there but by faith he chose against that life. We do not know the identity of this daughter of Pharaoh. Identifying with the “people of God” rather than saying with the “people of Israel” indicates a religious rather than an ethnic identification. Moses is then seen as a man of faith from God rather than some revolutionary.

The author states that Moses was indeed spiritually mature in that he recognized that any pleasures afforded by sin were very temporary and so of no lasting value. He knew that whatever pleasures he could attain from the godless court of Pharaoh were of no comparison to the eternal riches of God. He was gladly turning himself over to receive the ill-treatments that the godless world poured on God’s people rather than staying in the house of Pharaoh. The reproach of Christ refers to the disgrace people receive from the world because they are of Christ. This reminds me of: *Rom 8:18 For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed to us.* Paul had been a well-respected person in the world before he was born again and he gladly gave up all of that life and suffered greatly for Christ knowing that the promises of God far exceed any riches of this world. Moses knew a life of fantastic riches and pampering but he preferred to receive the disgrace that would come from rejecting that life and choosing to be with the people of God. He had no insight as to how highly he would be thought of in Christian history but he chose that path anyway. Today we are not even sure who the Pharaoh was at this time in the life of Moses but Moses is well-known throughout the world. My identification with Jesus Christ has stopped my university career many times but I have no regrets. All Christians need to think long-term. The readers of this account of the faith of Moses would have been very encouraging to them in their precarious situations.

Heb 11:27-28 By faith he left Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king; for he endured, as seeing Him who is unseen. ²⁸By faith he kept the Passover and the sprinkling of the blood, so that he who destroyed the first-born might not touch them.

(3) Moses left Egypt on two occasions. The first was when he killed the Egyptian oppressor (Exodus 2:11-15) and the second time was at the Exodus. This reference is probably in reference to his first leaving for Midian although Exodus 2:14 states that Moses was afraid after he killed the man. Moses was afraid but it was not fear that caused him to leave Egypt this first time. It is not likely that this action would have evoked a wrath from the king as was seen after there was a great chase after the people as the nation left Egypt. He could have stayed and led a slave revolt but his faith led him to not raise himself as such a leader but to flee to his people to await the purpose of God. Moses endured the forty years of being a shepherd after leaving Egypt by remaining focused on God. Some will translate the Hebrew verb as “initiated” rather than “kept” for it was by faith (4) that this first Passover was initiated and then kept (Exodus 12:14). This became a perpetual memorial for Israel of their last night in Egypt as the angel of death destroyed the firstborn in every home except for those marked by the blood of the paschal lamb.

God prevented the destroyer from entering these doors. In 1 Cor 5:7 and John 19:36 Jesus is presented at the antitype of the paschal lamb. He adds the sprinkling of the blood (Exodus 12:17) as a further illustration of the act of faith (5) in saving their first-born children from the destroyer.

Heb 11:29 By faith they passed through the Red Sea as though they were passing through dry land; and the Egyptians, when they attempted it, were drowned.

Now the author moves very logically to the people who went with Moses from Egypt. From reading about the wilderness wanderings we know that there were not many people of great faith in the group! The author could have used this as another example of the faith of Moses but he chose to include the people. It does show some faith for them to follow Moses through the Red Sea and not to give up to the army chasing them. God accomplished this act by using the east wind but it was their faith that allowed them to follow Moses with the wall of water reared up on the sides. The Egyptian army showed great courage but they lacked faith and so perished. There is no further act of faith on the part of the people recorded in the Bible and the author has already written of their lack of faith during the wandering:

Heb 3:7-11 Therefore, just as the Holy Spirit says, "Today if you hear His voice, ⁸Do not harden your hearts as when they provoked Me, As in the day of trial in the wilderness, ⁹Where your fathers tried Me by testing Me, And saw My works for forty years. ¹⁰"Therefore I was angry with this generation, And said, 'They always go astray in their heart; And they did not know My ways'; ¹¹As I swore in My wrath, ' They shall not enter My rest.' "

Heb 11:30 By faith the walls of Jericho fell down, after they had been encircled for seven days.

The author does not mention Joshua either here or in the above verse but probably he is included in this verse (Josh 6:1-21). Nothing but faith can account for the actions of these soldiers as they marched around the wall. There is no military tactic that gives such instructions! They did not attack but simply walked around the city once a day for six days and then seven times on the seventh day. They simply acted out their faith probably to the amazement and amusement of the people within the city. But God acted and the wall came down. Excavations have not revealed what forces God used for this act. This was the Late Bronze Age Jericho and considerable erosion removed evidence before the foundation of the Iron Age Jericho. We can only know that the people acted in faith and God took care of the rest. Paul spoke to this: *2Cor 10:3-4 For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh, ⁴for the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh, but divinely powerful for the destruction of fortresses.*

Heb 11:31 By faith Rahab the harlot did not perish along with those who were disobedient, after she had welcomed the spies in peace.

This may seem like an unlikely inclusion in this list of people who possessed God's faith. She was from outside Israel and was a harlot. This word describes a secular prostitute and not a temple prostitute so it is not possible to soften her background. She was a sinner saved by faith. It took great faith for her to welcome God's people in peace knowing that she would have been killed by her people if they knew what she did. Tradition says that she married Joshua and became the ancestress of eight priests. She is also listed as one of four women of great beauty. She is listed in the genealogy of our Lord as the wife of Salmon (Matt 1:5). She is also mentioned by James as he demonstrates that true faith is seen by actions: *James 2:25 And in the same way was not Rahab the harlot also justified by works, when she received the messengers and sent them out by another way?*

Heb 11:32-34 And what more shall I say? For time will fail me if I tell of Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, of David and Samuel and the prophets,³³ who by faith conquered kingdoms, performed acts of righteousness, obtained promises, shut the mouths of lions,³⁴ quenched the power of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, from weakness were made strong, became mighty in war, put foreign armies to flight.

He could have kept writing about people demonstrating their faith for a long time but a complete description of such people is not his goal. He is demonstrating to the recipients of this letter that many people have suffered and died for God rather than capitulate to the pressures of the world. The first four he mentions are only mentioned here in the NT and Samuel is only mentioned twice more. Of course David is mentioned many times. We do not know if there is any reason for the order of the listing and he does not go into any detail about their actions of faith. We can study the OT and see that each of these men faced huge problems and it is only by faith that they could have succeeded. The OT also lifts up some failures for four of these men and such just serves to demonstrate that God's people are not successful in their tribute to God entirely on their own basis. Faith is always required for success before God's eyes and people do not always use their faith properly.

In verse 33 he lists some ways in which men of faith acted out their faith. Joshua, David and others conquered kingdoms and the statement of ones who performed acts of righteousness probably refers to those who administered justice as did some Judges. Those who obtained promises could refer to people like Abraham who obtained a portion of the promise of God and to Moses who at least got to see the Promised Land. Those who shut the mouths of lions could include Daniel, David, and Benaiah (1 Chron 11:22).

In verse 34 he mentions other acts of faith. The author probably has in mind Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego whom Nebuchadnezzar cast into the fiery furnace and emerged unharmed. If they had been told by God that they would not be harmed, facing the fire would have required some

faith. But not being told that they would emerge unscathed required tremendous faith. Those who escaped the edge of the sword are probably those attacked but not killed by a sword such as Elijah who was not killed by Jezebel (1 Kings 19:2), Elisha from her son Jehoram (2 Kings 6:31-7:2), and Jeremiah from Jerahmeel, Jehoakim's son (Jer 36:19, 26). Those who initially were weak but became strong could be people like Gideon who became mighty in war and put foreign armies to flight. Such people were victorious because they acted on their faith and God was the conqueror.

Heb 11:35-38 Women received back their dead by resurrection; and others were tortured, not accepting their release, in order that they might obtain a better resurrection;³⁶ and others experienced mockings and scourgings, yes, also chains and imprisonment.³⁷ They were stoned, they were sawn in two, they were tempted, they were put to death with the sword; they went about in sheepskins, in goatskins, being destitute, afflicted, ill-treated³⁸(men of whom the world was not worthy), wandering in deserts and mountains and caves and holes in the ground.

Several times Scripture informs us of women who received their dead back to life: Elijah's hostess (1 Kings 17:17-24), the Shunammite who befriended Elisha (2 Kings 4:18-37), the son of the widow of Nain (Luke 7:11-14), Lazarus (John 11), and Dorcas (Acts 9:36-41). Today we rightly distinguish between resuscitation of a person to a regained mortal life to die again and to resurrection of the dead to life immortal. However the Bible does not make that distinction in its vocabulary. But some were tortured and died to obtain a better resurrection by which the author means what we now call resurrection. The author is probably saying a better resurrection since only those who are in Christ will receive such a resurrection. Many other people of faith received horrible treatments because they would not recant the lordship of Jesus Christ.

Today Christians are mocked more and more openly by the world but such pales in comparison to the treatments of these people and by others in the years since. Tradition says that Isaiah was killed by being sawed in two. Zechariah was stoned to death (2 Chron 24:21) and mentioned by Jesus (Matt 23:37). The apocalyptic literature gives many examples of the horrible deaths suffered by some of God's saints because they refused to recant Jesus as their Lord. Sometimes God saves people from death and sometimes He allows them to be killed. However all people of faith will be greatly rewarded in the promised city that lasts forever and there they will live in peace with God. Some of the people were of a lower class based upon the descriptions of their garments and he states that the world was not worthy of these people that they judged to be not worthy of their presence. At the time of justice the world will be turned upside down. These people of faith had no great homes and did not pine for any earthly mansions for they were filled with joy knowing that they had a great promise waiting for them. I am reminded of what Jesus said: *Matt 8:20 And Jesus said to him, "The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests;*

but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head." The Lord of Heaven set the example for all Christians of all ages.

Faith given by God to His children does not guarantee a comfortable existence in this world and that is a major point being made by the author of Hebrews. However this faith does give a certain hope of life forever with God in His celestial city.

Heb 11:39-40 And all these, having gained approval through their faith, did not receive what was promised, ⁴⁰because God had provided something better for us, so that apart from us they should not be made perfect.

These people of faith accomplished much for the Kingdom of God but it was not their works that made them perfect. They were made perfect the same way that people of all ages are made perfect and that is through the works of Jesus Christ. God made many promises to people and many of the people received some promises while they lived and the remainder after their death. But here the author is referring to a single promise which is righteousness and none of them achieved such by their works. The "us" in this last verse includes all Christians and none of the people of faith of all ages have been made perfect apart from how Christians are made perfect before Holy God. All people of all ages are made righteous only by the works of Jesus Christ. The universal, invisible church includes people all over the world of all times who have been chosen to receive justification by Christ through the grace of God. Praise Him!