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By the Book™ A Chapter by Chapter Bible Study Series from Jerry Vines Ministries
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Let's Begin

Hebrews 11 takes us on a tour through a museum of Old Testament heroes of our spiritual heritage—what many have called the “Hall of Faith.” Faith after all is the operative principle of the Christian life (10:38). This noteworthy collage of men and women is composed of those whom we expect to make the cut on a list like this, men like Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Moses.

Because of their great faith, no list of worthies could be considered complete without their names. Surprisingly, however, there are a number of individuals who would not make “our” list of worthies—Rahab, Barak, and Jephthah, for example. Even so, they made God’s list, and for that reason alone, they belong in the Hebrews “Hall of Faith.”

The author takes us on a trip back in history hoping to inspire us to run the race of life (Heb. 11:39–12:1). A great “cloud of witnesses” fills the heavenly stadium as we make our holy run at life. In full public view, we set out for the prize of Jesus Christ, the end-goal of our faith.

As we make our way through chapter 11, let’s focus on the outline below:

- I. Faith Declared (vv. 1-2)**
- II. Faith Described (v. 3)**
- III. Faith Demonstrated (vv. 4-40)**

I. Faith Declared (vv. 1-2)

The sections are definitely uneven in this chapter, the first three verses declaring what faith is and describing what faith looks like. But the remainder of the chapter peels away page after page of examples of Old Testament saints demonstrating the practicality of the life of faith.

The author begins with a *definition* of faith, “Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen. For by it the elders obtained a good report” (Heb. 11:1-2). First, faith is a matter of “substance.” The Greek term for “substance” is *hupostasis*, and means “a standing under,” or a “support.” The idea conveys *assurance* of a steady foundation. Faith is to a Christian what a foundation is to a house; it gives confidence concerning the integrity of the structure.

Another way the term was applicable was in the business world describing documents which provided

evidence of ownership. In today’s terms, it would be like the deed to our house or a title to our car. Faith, therefore, reaches out to facts not yet come to pass and claims their reality.

The author further declares faith to be “evidence,” the Greek word is *elegmos*; it means “refuting error.” Hence, to have evidence is to prove one’s case by offering tangible testimony. The author of Hebrews assembles an impressive list of witnesses throughout the chapter to demonstrate the life of faith (see below).

In relation to the future, faith is the substance, the guarantee God will make good His promises. On the other hand, in relation to the invisible, faith is the evidence, enabling us to treat the unseen as seen. Faith, therefore, is all about simple *trust* in God; faith is taking God at His word no matter the circumstances or consequences.

Reflection Connection

Take a moment to meditate upon your faith. Would you characterize your faith as weak or strong? Healthy or unhealthy? Explain your answer.



Additionally, through faith the “elders obtained a good report” (v. 2). Faith was put to the test in actual circumstances. It is as if God was saying, “If you want to live by faith you can. Just look at all the faithful men throughout the ages who succeeded through faith!” How sobering to imagine our own legacy when we come to the end of our time on earth. Will faith characterize our life?

II. Faith Described (v. 3)

Moving on from a bold *declaration* of what faith is, the author briefly records how faith may be *described*. He writes, “Through faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that things which are seen were not made of things which do appear” (v. 3). Since no one was around when the galaxies and planets were formed from nothing, we are dependent upon an element of faith to “understand” how the world was created.

Though so-called “evolutionary science” boasts of presenting the “scientific fact” of evolution, the reality is, there are no such things as scientific facts pertaining to the origin of life. Science depends upon repeatable experiments which can be measured and tested in a controlled environment. No such criteria can be fulfilled when considering the origin of life. What one believes about the origin of the universe requires an act of faith no matter what view one holds!

Even so, faith is perfectly described when we consider the universe’s origin. Do we place our trust in what fallible human beings assert, “factual” assertions which are repeatedly rewritten and/or recanted? Or, do we place our trust in the eternal God of the Bible, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ Who loved us and gave Himself for us? Framed in these stark contrasts, only the latter makes any sense at all.

III. Faith Demonstrated (vv. 4-40)

After declaring what faith is and describing what faith looks like, the author is ready to offer a litany of evidence to demonstrate the reality of the life of faith. He begins our rapid journey through the Old Testament, selecting sixteen outstanding examples of those who walked by faith.

Observe his impressive list below:

Abel (v. 4; cp. Gen. 4): possessed a *worshipping* faith. He “brought his gift and “offered” it to the Lord. It was a “more excellent” sacrifice than his brother Cain’s for the simple reason it was offered in faith. While Scripture does not mention why Cain’s was rejected by God, the implication is, *Cain’s offering lacked faith*. Consequently, Abel “obtained witness” that his trust was completely in God.

Enoch (vv. 5-6; Gen. 5:18–24): Enoch possessed a *walking* faith. We read of Enoch’s walk with God—that he walked among a people of death. People were dying all around Enoch. Nevertheless, God spared Enoch from death taking him straight to heaven. Undoubtedly, Enoch’s “translation” is a picture of the end-time rapture when an entire generation of believers will also be spared death. Enoch walked with God by faith. Enoch’s faith demonstrated the futility of life without faith, for the lack of faith constitutes circumstances where “it is impossible to please God” (v. 6).



Noah (v. 7; Gen. 5:29–10:32): revealed a *witnessing* faith. He trusted God in warning people even before the first drop of rain began to fall. According to the author's description, Noah was "moved with fear." He acted in holy reverence. God said it, and His word was enough for Noah. Unfortunately, the world did not listen and was consequently condemned.

Abraham (vv. 8–19; Gen. 12–25): exhibited a *wandering* faith. He searched for a city, a city with foundations of which its "builder and maker is God" (v. 10). When Abraham was called, he instantly obeyed. One moment he worshipped a pagan moon god and the next he followed after Yahweh (Gen. 12:1-3). Not knowing where he was going he knew whom he followed. And, he followed by faith, sojourning and "dwelling in tents" (v. 9). Abraham did not allow strangers to prohibit him honoring God. Though it was a "strange country" through which he wandered, he kept his eyes on heaven—listening for the voice of God, "looking for a city" God promised him. As faith-filled as Abraham was, he was still a human being with human desires and ambitions. Hence, he took matters into his own hands concerning his son, attempting to fulfill God's promise by having his concubine birth him a son. Nonetheless, Sarah would be the one to birth the chosen one (v. 11). The offering of this son a decade and a half later proved the most challenging test of Abraham's faith (vv. 17-19). Faith again came to the rescue for Abraham, for he accounted that "God was able to raise him up, even from the dead" (v. 19). Abraham rightly is called the father of our faith.

Sarah (v. 11; Gen. 12–23; Isa. 51:2): is one of only two women in the author's "hall of faith." Though she at first laughed when she was told she would bear a son when she was past 90 years of age, she came around and eventually believed God's promise.

Isaac (vv. 17–20; Gen. 17–35): exhibited a *wishful* faith, longing to bless Jacob and Esau with a generous inheritance. Though at times Isaac proved faithless and weak, he nonetheless reminds us all how gracious God is to use imperfect vessels.

Jacob (v. 21; Gen. 25–50): undoubtedly expressed what we could call a *weak* faith. He was a stereotypical "con-artist" who possessed the ethics of a rascal. Like his father Isaac, he always walked in the shadow of Abraham's great faith. Jacob is an easy person with whom to identify. His worldly ways resemble many of us. As with Isaac, so with Jacob, however: God was pleased to work with him and in him. The Lord can mold a person the way He sees fit. God had to break Jacob down, one layer at a time. Our prayer should be that He does the same with us. Jacob's final hour was his finest hour. He learned through a life of faith how to finish well. He left his sons a great *testimony* (Gen. 48:3-4) as he dies with the name of the Lord on his lips (cp. also Ps. 77:3; 104:34) as well as a substantial *treasure*.

Joseph (vv. 21–22; Gen. 37–50): exhibited a *liberating* faith. He alluded to the exodus as he "made mention of departing." His deathbed demonstrated the faith walk Joseph had all throughout his life. The name of his God was on his lips as he passed into eternity. In fact, his death is reminiscent of Jesus' death on the cross. His bones were indicative of where he belonged.



Therefore, he wanted them in his homeland. What God did for Joseph He does for each of His faithful children.

Moses (vv. 23–28; Ex. 2:10 and throughout the Pentateuch): revealed a three-fold faith. First, his legacy began with a *parental* faith. Because of Amram and Jochebed's faithfulness to God, Moses survived the harsh laws against the survival of Hebrew children in his day. He was "hid three months" from Pharaoh's deputies. But while his parents could save Moses from danger, they could not save him from damnation. Moses, therefore, had a *personal* faith to develop. His integrity prohibited him from being called an Egyptian, an honor in a slave society he flatly "refused." Forfeiting an easy life in the palace, he chose to retain his Hebrew roots. In his mind, "greater riches" were found with Israel than Egypt. Finally, Moses had a *purposeful* faith. Hence, he "forsook Egypt," leaving physically what he had never embraced spiritually. Like Abraham before him, he too searched for roots which only found stability in God Almighty. He saw by faith what others could never see. For him, pleasures led away from God not toward Him. Faith led him away from Egypt and then back again only to lead his people out (v. 28). Through the Red Sea they marched (v. 29), later watching the walls of Jericho tumble down before a heart filled with faith (v. 30). Moses was a man of faith!

Reflection Connection

On a scale of one to 10 (ten being the healthiest), how would you rank your life as a life of faith? Were there an open spot in this list, do you think your name could possibly be entered? Why or why not?

Rahab (v. 31; Jsh. 2:1, 3; 6:17–25): only a line exists for this extraordinary woman; however, her faith in assisting Joshua placed her in the faith hall for all eternity. A Gentile and outcast, and prostitute, Rahab is nonetheless a heroine. She was a condemned woman living in a condemned city. But God had mercy on her. Rahab's faith made her whole. She "received" the spies "with peace." For this, her eternal reward is great.

Gideon (v. 32; Jg. 6–8): Both fearful and hesitant at first, Gideon became a great leader through faith. God takes nobodies and makes somebodies!

Barak (v. 32; Jg. 4–5): was the son of Abinoam of Kedesh in Naphtali (Jg. 4:6; 5:1), and an associate of the prophetess Deborah. He successfully led an army of Israel that defeated the forces of Jabin, king of the Canaanites (Jg. 4:1–24). The lesser light (Deborah being the stronger light) is in a position to display the mighty power of God through faith.

Samson (v. 32; Jg. 13–16): was a prominent Judge and successful warrior against the Philistines. However, his weakness for pagan women broke his faith focus and was the occasion for his downfall (Jg. 16:1ff). Though departing from the Lord during a dark period, Samson ironically found himself as a blind man enslaved by his enemies. As a dying request, he asked the Lord for strength, and collapsed an entire building, killing more Philistines in this final act than he had previously slain. Samson's spark of faith never was finally snuffed out. Real faith never will cease. God sees to it.

Jephthah (v. 32; Jg. 11–12; 1 Sam. 12:11): was surely the most surprising person in the author's list of men and women who walked by faith. The son of a harlot, Jephthah was dispossessed by his father's other sons and refused a share in their father's home. He is best known for his role as a reluctant Judge who, upon agreeing to lead a charge against the Ammonites, vowed to the Lord that if he was victorious, on his return home he would sacrifice



to God the first that met him at the door of his house. Unfortunately, the first one to meet him was his virgin daughter. However one interprets the narrative at this point, one thing remains sure: Jephthah can only be described as a man of faith. Living by the code of his time, he set out to please the Lord.

David (v. 32; Ruth 4; 1–2 Sam.): Why the King of Israel received no more than barely a mention in the “hall of faith” is as surprising as the inclusion of some of the above. The author is keenly aware of the dilemma he is in, “And what shall I more say? for the time would fail me to tell...” he writes (v. 32). He knows he cannot do justice to the sheer masses of witnesses he is assembling to demonstrate the life of faith. God’s favorite King, David the Shepherd, is undoubtedly the one the author had in mind when he mentioned, by faith, they “escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness were made strong, waxed valiant in fight, turned to flight the armies of the aliens” (v. 34). Often barely escaping from Saul’s blade, David stayed alive through faith. In addition, it was through faith the “weakness” of his pebble was “made strong” against the towering Goliath. Waxing “valiant in fight,” King David “turned to flight” the enemies of God’s chosen people.

Samuel (v. 32; 1 Sam; 1 Chron. 6: 9; 11:26; 2 Chron. 35:18): Samuel was the last of the judges (1 Sam. 7:6, 15–17) and the first of the prophets (cp. Acts 3:24; 13:20). He anointed Israel’s first King—Saul—whom he twice reproved. First, he corrected Saul for impatience and disobedience (1 Sam. 13:5–14). The second time was harsh: Saul’s disobedience to the Lord’s explicit command forced Samuel to issue a notice that God rejected him as king (15:20–23). Being a man of fervent prayer (1 Sam. 15:11; Ps. 99:6), Samuel’s faith flowed from his life. He well deserves a place among the great men of faith.

Golden Greek Nugget

The author reminds his readers of the definitive role of faith in the believer’s life by affirming through faith, “we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God.” The English phrase “were framed” is the Greek word *katartizo*, which itself comes from compounding two other Greek words meaning “down” (*kata*) and “joint” (*artos*). Consequently, *katartizo* carries the idea of fitting and/or equipping. God equipped and fitted the world for habitation by the sheer force of His uttered word.

Wrap Up

In this study, we have discovered what faith is. More importantly, however, we have experienced living proof that faith can be lived. Is your life a life of faith? Why not? The men and women of old are no more virtuous than you and I. Nor did they possess more revelation from God. In fact, they had less! Yet, they were incredible men and women of faith.

