

Bible Study Fellowship WordGo Scripture Notes

Hebrews Chapter 11

Nothing motivates action like vivid, true stories of those who have already completed the task. Hebrews gives examples of courageous women and men whose active faith overcame fear, personal challenges, overwhelming obstacles, temptations and persecution unto death. Hebrews calls believers to live out such faith with hope and love. Throughout history, God's salvation plan involves the faithful actions of His people. Will you commit to these actions? Will you leave a legacy of faith in Jesus Christ alone?

Faith Defined – 11:1

Chapter 11 presents authentic examples to follow. It recalls people from Israel's history whose stories proved they lived by faith. **Verse 1 gives the only formal definition of faith in the Bible. However,** faith is described, discussed and displayed throughout God's Word.

- **Saving faith acts on the gospel's content** to repent, believe, follow and flourish in a reconciled relationship with God.
- **Faith reveals a new identity** and reality as a new creation in a new order.
- **Faith depends on currently unseen realities.** Just as shadows give way to substance, faith gives way to sight.
- Faith is not a wishful feeling found by looking within. **Faith is to stake your life on a greater external object to experience full purpose and meaning.**

Faith's Common Beliefs – 11:2-7

People of faith focus their eyes on God's invisible realities. His plan is infinitely more important than what is visible. **God commends those who make His truths the foundation of their lives.** Do you "see" the world God's way and make your life choices by His truths? Historically, all believers at all times have shared certain truths.

- **God created the universe.** He spoke and made what is visible from what is invisible – from nothing. People are responsible to Him as His creatures. We must answer for how we treat His world. All created things declare His eternal power and divine nature. God's creation exists so that all would honor and thank Him.
- **God's holiness requires sinners offer Him a faithful sacrifice.** Cain and Abel prove God sees worshippers' hearts. He prioritizes what is invisible to us over the visible offering. Genesis 4:3-4 stresses the person's faith is the priority. The Hebrew text reads literally: Abel's faith compelled him to bring the best possible offering. God was displeased with Cain's unfaithfulness.
- **Life after death** – God caused Enoch to bypass death and directly enter into His presence. God's action gives proof of future life. Enoch's legacy proclaims that those with faith please God. They will experience eternal life with Him. What proof supports faith in the life to come? The verified resurrection of Jesus Christ.
- **The wrath to come** – Noah escaped God's wrath in the judgment of the flood by acting in faith. While Noah was building the ark, its looming presence served to warn others of judgment. It

also invited all to exercise faith in God. Jesus warned His return will be like those days – Noah listened and obeyed; others did not repent. Scoffers still deny such a day is coming, just as they did in Noah's day.

Faith's Great Example – 11:8-12

Abraham, also called Abram, received God's covenant. The unconditional covenant destined him to become the father of the nation of Israel. He is also the spiritual father of everyone with God-given faith. He models how to live by faith.

- **Abraham's obedience** – When God called Abram from Ur, he obeyed by faith. By faith, he and his wife Sarah left country, family and home to pioneer a new land.
- **Abraham's contentment** – He believed God's promise to give him the land. Until that time came, he and Sarah were content to live in tents in Canaan. They looked beyond this earth to their life with God to come.
- **Abraham's hope** – Abraham and Sarah waited about 25 years for God's promised son. They continued to hope even after they were physically too old to bear children. In God's time, Isaac was miraculously born.

Faith's Legacy – 11:13-16

The Hebrews who received this letter knew all about the people named. The audience shared the faith of their ancestors in God's promises. Centuries passed when few of these realities seemed to be fulfilled. Generations lived by faith in God's promised seed, ultimately the Lord Jesus Christ. They looked and waited, but none saw that day. Instead, they served as trailblazing believers. In a similar way, **all believers can persevere despite unmet desires or expectations**. Whatever comes, will you look beyond yourself with the eyes of faith to God's promised future?

Tests of Faith Recounted – 11:17-40

It is one thing to claim belief. It is another to prove that claim through testing. We must remember: **tests from God are designed for good**. God never tempts people to do evil. Testing calls believers to draw nearer to God. His faithfulness is proved as they depend on Him for the power to obey. Testing can produce proofs of faith as a testimony to others of God's greatness.

- **Abraham** – God tested Abraham with His command to sacrifice Isaac, the son of promise. Abraham obeyed God without wavering. **The choice to obey by faith is never unfounded or unrewarded**. Abraham reasoned God would raise his son from the dead. Figuratively speaking, God did!
- **Isaac** – God called Isaac to bless Jacob over Esau. God's command overruled social expectations, emotions, Rebekah's schemes and Isaac's stubbornness. **Isaac finally chose God's way by faith** when he told Esau, "I blessed him [Jacob] – and indeed he will be blessed!"
- **Jacob** – When Jacob was on his deathbed, God called him to prophesy blessings to Joseph's two sons, not because of their natural advantages by birth, but by God's gracious will. Jacob had schemed to get ahead of his brother Esau and his father-in-law Laban. In the end, Jacob admitted **if God had not been working in his life, nothing he did would have amounted to anything**.

- **Joseph** – Joseph faithfully thrived throughout a life of extended testing. On his deathbed, he prophesied about Israel’s Exodus from Egypt. He commanded the freed generation to carry his bones back into God’s promised land with them. **Joseph’s coffin remained in view of his descendants for about 400 years as evidence of his faith.** Then, God brought about His promised deliverance, and Joseph’s bones were carried out in victory.
- **Moses’ parents** – Amran and Jochebed hid the infant Moses in defiance of the Egyptian king’s order to drown all Hebrew male babies. **Their actions displayed faith in God’s plans for his life.**
- **Moses** – Moses rejected Egypt’s power, wealth, splendor, and culture for “disgrace for the sake of Christ.” This means he suffered rejection because He believed God’s Word. He saw the Christ, ever-present to the eye of faith. **Moses acted like the promised Messiah.** He obeyed God despite suffering to bring about God’s plan for the people’s freedom. Passover pictured Christ’s sacrifice to shield participants from God’s just judgment.
- **Israel** – All Israel miraculously passed through the Red Sea, which God parted. Their existence as a new nation began through faith. Likewise, **each new creature in Christ begins by grace through faith in Him.**
- **Joshua** – After years of wandering, **the people renewed their covenant with God to enter the promised land.** Joshua led Israel to circle Jericho’s fortress for seven days as God commanded. Joshua believed God would achieve a miraculous victory. Faith triumphed. Jericho’s impenetrable walls fell.
- **Rahab** – The list includes Israel’s faithful patriarchs and leaders plus a Gentile woman. She became another hero of faith. Rahab was a prostitute who showed honor and hospitality to Israel’s spies. **Rahab revered the God of the Hebrews more than her king of Jericho.** Her faith saved many. In fact, she is an ancestor of Jesus Christ.
- **A Great Host** – Like raising the stage curtain to honour the entire cast at the end of their performance, the writer rapidly lists many other key heroes of faith in Israel’s history: Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, David, Samuel and “the prophets.” **History records most of these faithful faced impossible odds.** God was with them all.

These people **proved their faith by depending on God’s power to obey His Word.** The list includes victorious achievements we all long to experience. It also includes times of despair, horrific persecution and death that none should desire. Faith does not promise a happy ending to trouble in our days. Yet God weaves individual lives of faith together across the generations for something better – a story of God’s great salvation that all believers will share forever.

What are your memories of entering unfamiliar or uncomfortable territories – a new city, a new job, or your first musical recital, sporting event or public presentation? Perhaps you recall a difficult conversation, confrontation, or collaboration with a hard-hearted person? In these moments, it is time to move from listening and learning to action. Likewise, the letter to the Hebrews teaches how “shadows” gave way to the substance of Jesus Christ and the light of His first coming. All who believe in the risen and reigning Christ are called and encouraged to press on in faith.

