



FAITH'S
CONQUERORS

—
HEBREWS 11

WILDERNESS CAMP

HEBREWS 11

**FAITH'S
CONQUERORS**

STUDY NOTES • 2021



WELCOME

Welcome to Wilderness Camp! We are delighted that you have chosen to join us and are looking forward to a motivating study of Hebrews 11 followed by an exciting camp together. Wilderness Camp, as its name implies, is designed to help each of us put aside quiet time regularly – away from all the distractions in our lives – and spend time alone with God and His Word.

As you are doubtless aware, to meet this aim, the Camp involves a personal commitment by each of us as attendees to study Hebrews 11. These notes will help in accomplishing that – they are easy to read yet filled with fascinating insights into this incredible chapter.

As you will see from the Camp Program (available on the website) the Camp will be structured around interactive workshops and discussion groups, rather than a series of talks, so the success of the camp relies upon your preparation!

What does this mean for me?

As an attendee at Wilderness Camp, you are expected to:

- Prioritise attendance at the **Preparatory Workshops**.
- Listen to the series on **Living Faith** by Bro Phil Perry, available on the website.
- Study Hebrews 11 using the **Camp Notes**, as well as any other materials you may like to use.
- **Mark your study** in your Bible.

With that done, we will all be well prepared for the activities at the Camp!

Of course, there are far more insights into Hebrews 11 than could be captured in these Notes. There are many additional resources available from within and without the Christadelphian community; some of these will be placed on our Resources page, should you like to utilize them. All of the study resources can be found at wilderness-camp.com/studyresources.

We would like to thank Bro Phil Perry, upon whose notes for Perth EOYS 2017 this current set of Notes has been based.

We trust this will be an exciting opportunity to study Hebrews 11 and that you will find it a very reasonable goal if you put aside time regularly for your study. Please get in touch with us early if you would like any assistance planning how you can complete the study.

We look forward to sharing Wilderness Camp 2021 with you, God willing.

May God bless you,

The Wilderness Camp Committee, January 2021

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INTRODUCTION

Time was running out for the Hebrews. The destruction of their beloved city, Jerusalem, loomed before them. If they were to have any hope of surviving, it was going to require extraordinary faith and an unwavering commitment to the Son of God.

Judea had borne the Roman oppression for many years now. Under the *Pax Romana*, the Jews had been able to practice their religion with little interference and the Gospel had spread far and wide throughout the Empire. But now times were changing. Many were growing restless under the Roman yoke, and the Romans themselves were tiring of the troublesome Jews. Signs of war were on the horizon. As we will see later in these notes, this meant life or death for the Hebrews. Their fate would depend on their response to the appeal of this letter!

Yet even in the face of such a catastrophe, some of the Brethren were turning back to their former lives. Under pressure from friends and family, and in fear for their lives, they were turning away from Christ – forsaking the Ecclesia and treading upon the blood of the man whose sacrifice had brought the hope of salvation!

Against that backdrop, the eleventh chapter of Hebrews is full of inspiring examples of men and women who lived by faith. These are not just any men and women, or any random examples of faith. They have been carefully chosen and specially woven together – each one for a reason of its own – to carry a much-needed message of encouragement, warning and appeal to the Brethren.

This is not simply an interesting study. As it was for the Hebrews, this is a study of vital importance to us. A strong faith outworked in our life choices is crucial for every one of us, because “*without faith it is impossible to please Him (God)*” (Heb 11:6). Faith is not an optional extra to a Godly life; it is indispensable.

How then do young people develop and maintain a living faith? How can people avoid losing their faith when severe trials of life come? This is the wonderful story of the lives of the faithful in Hebrews 11.

BACKGROUND



HISTORICAL SETTING

When we learn the first principles of understanding the Bible, one of the most important pieces of advice we receive is to always read the context of any Bible quote.

Hebrews 11 is a chapter packed full of inspiration for living by faith. However, the significance and power of the examples quoted in the chapter can be largely missed unless the context of the letter of the Hebrews is understood. This is why it is vital to understand the context or background of the epistle.

Key items of background are:

- **Who** was Hebrews written to?
- **Who** is the writer?
- **When** was Hebrews written?
- **What** are circumstances of the readers of the epistle and what are the issues that readers are facing?

WHO WAS HEBREWS WRITTEN TO?

Unlike most epistles, the beginning of the epistle to the Hebrews does not name the ecclesia to whom it is written. However it can be gleaned from various references and allusions in the epistle that this is most likely written to the Jerusalem Ecclesia.

Some writers suggest that Hebrews is written to the Jewish brethren scattered throughout the Gentile world. However, the tone of Hebrews is that of a letter written to brethren in a particular area. Eg: 13:23 *"know ye that our brother Timothy is set at liberty; with whom, if he come shortly, I will see you"*. This makes sense if a particular ecclesia is meant. See also 10:32-34; 13:19.

The believers to whom it is written are certainly Jewish. There are many Jewish expressions throughout the epistle such as; *"The fathers"* (1:1), *"Your fathers"* (3:9), *"the people"* – i.e. the people of Israel (2:17, 5:3). The readers are presumed to have a detailed understanding of the Scriptures and the history of Israel. There are seven quotations from the Old Testament in Hebrews 1 alone. Other expressions also assume a familiarity with the Old Testament scriptures:

- 2:6 *"But one in a certain place testified"* (quoting Psa 8)
- 4:7 *"saying in David"* (quoting Psa 95), and
- 9:8 *"the holy spirit this signifying"* (alluding to Lev 16).

The book has been entitled *"Hebrews"* which gives further indication that it is not just written to Jews in general. In the early Jewish ecclesia, there is distinction drawn between Jews living outside the land of Israel, the diaspora, referred to as Hellenists, and those who lived in the land, termed Hebrews¹. For example, *"there arose a murmuring of the Grecians (Thayer & Strong identify these as Hellenists) against the Hebrews because their widows were neglected in the*

daily ministrations." Acts 6:1. Also 2Cor 11:22, Phil 3:5. Gen 40:15 (Joseph referred to Israel as the land of the Hebrews).

There is repeated reference to a "city" which would fit with Jerusalem:

- 13:12-14 "here we have no continuing city";
- 11:10, 16 "looked for a city with foundations"; and
- 12:22 "City of living God ... heavenly Jerusalem".

It is also interesting to note from the epistle that the ecclesia clearly had well-known, faithful leaders (13:7,17,24) which would fit with the leaders at the Jerusalem Ecclesia (Acts 21:17-19, 15:13 and Gal 2:9-12).

WHO IS THE WRITER?

There is no explicit reference to the writer of Hebrews within the epistle itself, which is quite different to the other epistles in the New Testament.

For the following reasons, as discussed in *Hebrews Study Notes* (Bro John Martin, CSSS 1976, p.2), Paul has commonly been proposed as the most likely candidate, although there is a long history of debate on the subject. For the purpose of these notes, Paul will be assumed to be the writer.

Indicator	Fitness of Paul
Well known to readers (13:19)	Spent many years at Jerusalem
Has authority of apostle, but did not accompany the Lord (2:3-4)	Not an apostle till Acts 9 (6 years after Christ's resurrection)
Timothy may come (13:23).	Spiritual son of Paul (1Tim 1:18; Cp Php 2:19)
Greetings from saints in Italy (13:24)	Paul released from Prison in Rome AD63
"Compassion in my bonds" (10:34)	Had been imprisoned in Jerusalem & Caesarea. "Bonds" is a characteristic term in Paul's epistles (Eph 6:20, Phil 1:7, 13-14 Col 4:18, Phm 10)

Others have suggested that the writer is Luke, Apollos or another. In the end, if the writer thought it essential that we know his identity, he would likely have included it. What there can be no doubt about is the message of his letter, and the urgency of his appeal.

¹The Greek word for the Greeks/Greece is "hellen". NT Scholar FF Bruce writes, "This division between Hebrews and Hellenists was primarily linguistic and cultural, but probably it had theological implications too. The Hebrews were evidently Jews who habitually spoke Aramaic, whose homeland was Palestine (or any other area where Aramaic-speaking Jews lived). The Hellenists, on the other hand, were Jews who spoke Greek and whose way of life, in the eyes of stricter Palestinians, smacked too much of Greek customs. Many of them would belong to the Greek-speaking Diaspora, even if they resided in Palestine for longer or shorter periods, but Palestine had its native Greek-speaking Jews. If we ask when and how so many of these Hellenists were enrolled as disciples of Jesus, we may find the answer in Luke's narrative of the day of Pentecost, according to which Jews of the Diaspora formed a large, if not the main, part of Peter's audience." (Bruce, FF 1971. *New Testament History*. Ch 17, p. 217-218).

WHEN WAS THE EPISTLE WRITTEN?

The time of writing of Hebrews is very important in understanding the purpose of the eleventh chapter. The epistle does not explicitly state the time of writing but there are sufficient clues to determine it with reasonable certainty.

- A generation had passed since the first work of the apostles 2:3-4
- The Temple is still in operation; therefore it was written before its destruction in AD 70. Note the present tense in the following verses:
 - 7:27 *"needeth not daily as those high priests to offer up sacrifice"*
 - 8:4 *"there are priests that offer gifts according to the Law: who serve..."*
 - 10:2-3 *"would they not have ceased to be offered?"*
- The writer has been imprisoned in the past, but is currently free or expecting imminent release:
 - 10:34 *"had compassion of me in my bonds"*
 - 13:23 *"with whom (Timothy) I will see you"*
- The writer appears to be in Rome
 - 13:24 *"They of Italy salute you"*

This narrows down the last decade before AD 70. If written by Paul, then some have suggested the letter was written about the end of AD 63.

WHAT ARE THE ISSUES FACING THE ECCLESIA?

There were several serious issues facing the ecclesia that this epistle is addressing.

- Influence of the Zealots
- Internal & external pressure to turn back to Judaism
- The destruction of Jerusalem - they had to leave

Influence of the Zealots

In the closing years before the destruction of the Jewish State and Temple by the Romans, the Jews became a fragmented community. Different parties had existed for many years – the Pharisees and Sadducees being two of the main factions. But the rising pressure from Rome drove deeper divisions between these groups, as they pursued different levels of compromise with, or separation from, the Romans. A new group began to emerge, claiming Phinehas, son of Eleazar, as their founder and mentor². This group were called the Zealots.

The Zealots shared in general the beliefs of the Pharisees, however they differed in their approach to Rome. The Pharisees *"were for the most part content to await God's good time and bear the foreign yoke as best they might until that time came,"* whereas the Zealots *"held that it was their duty to cooperate actively with what must be God's purpose – the liberation of Israel from the foreign yoke"*³. The Zealots aimed to incite a national revolt from Rome.

The Lord had instructed the ecclesia *NOT* to forcefully resist the Romans (Mt 26:52; Jn 18:36), but to honour Caesar in the appropriate manner (Mk 12:17). The Zealots fiercely opposed that approach. Like the other Jewish sects, the Zealots also believed that the Law was God's method of salvation, and that it should not be forsaken.

The rising tension between the different Jewish parties placed pressure on the Ecclesia. One

²Based on Num 25:7-13.

³Prof FF Bruce (1969). "The Zealots" in New Testament History, p.97.

thing they all held in common – to forsake the Law and turn to Christ was to be a traitor. The thing that was different about the Zealots was that they knew how to deal with such dissidents:

The Zealots would “mingle with crowds in Jerusalem during festivals and similar occasions and stab the objects of their displeasure unawares with daggers which they carried concealed about their clothes; they would then melt immediately into the surrounding crowds. Jewish leaders who were suspected of being hand-in-glove with the Romans, or at least insufficiently sympathetic to the patriotic cause, were the principle targets for such attacks; one of the earliest victims of the sicarii [a term used of the Zealots] was an ex-high priest, Jonathan son of Annas.”⁴

Thus, whilst their belief in Christ placed the brothers and sisters at variance from all of the Jewish community, the Zealots were their greatest threat. They viewed them as traitors to the nation. Not only would they excommunicate them from social life if they left the synagogue, they would kill them in their “zeal” for God’s Law and nation.

Under this pressure, many in the ecclesia were turning back to the Law. Even when Paul had visited Jerusalem with the Poor Fund back in Acts 21:20, there were already many brethren who were “zealous for the law.” Then, in around AD 62, James the Lord’s brother was killed (according to Josephus). He had been the leader of the Jerusalem Ecclesia up until his death, and thus a moderator of this zeal for the Law. Now with James gone and the influence of the Zealots rising in the city, many were looking to turn back to the Law.

Hence Paul repeatedly appeals to the Hebrews throughout the Epistle to remain true to Christ:

- 2:3 “How shall we escape **if we neglect** so great salvation”
- 3:12-14 “if we hold the beginning of our confidence **steadfast unto the end**”
- 4:11 “labour to enter into rest, **lest any fall** after the same example of unbelief”
- 6:11 “shew the same diligence to the full assurance of hope **unto the end**”
- 6:18 “**lay hold** upon the hope set before us”
- 10:23 “**hold fast** the profession of our faith **without wavering**”
- 10:35 “**cast not away** therefore your confidence”
- 12:25 “see that ye **refuse not** him that speaketh”

Paul reminds them that there will be no forgiveness if they turn back to Judaism. This is because returning to Judaism involved a denial of Christ:

- 6:4-6 “fall away ... crucify son of God afresh”
- 10:26 “sin willfully – no sacrifice for sin”
- 12:25-29 “refuse not him that speaketh”

It is easy for us to see the utter foolishness of the Hebrew brethren turning back to Judaism just as Yahweh was about to take away the Jewish Commonwealth and the Temple. Fancy giving up Christ for something that would disappear in less than 7 years!

Yet here we are on the brink of Christ’s return and there are people leaving the Truth and turning back to the world. There are others whose commitment has waned so that they are only half-hearted in their commitment to God. What a devastating decision this is when the world as we know it is about to disappear. The question for each one of us is – where are our hearts? In the world or in Christ?

⁴Prof FF Bruce (1969). “The Zealots” in New Testament History, p.99.

Turning Back to Judaism

The Zealots were not the only religious group in Jerusalem. The Pharisees, Sadducees and Essenes formed the three major religious parties, though the third lived more of a secluded existence in lives devoted to holiness in their own communities. From the Sadducees, in the days of Christ, were drawn many of the High Priests. A corrupt, money-driven priesthood, these were appointed by the Roman Governors of the day, rather than a God-given line of succession.⁵

Under the reign of Herod the Great (BC 37-4), the power of the Province of Judea rested firmly under his hand, and he appointed and deposed High Priests at whim⁶. However, following his death in BC 4, rulership of Jewish affairs returned to the Sanhedrin, who were dominated by the wealthy Sadducean families, with a minority contingent of the Pharisees, who held the support of the people. The power of the Sanhedrin is seen from the frequent references to it throughout the New Testament, under the titles of "*the council*", "*the Sanhedrin*", "*the chief priests and elders and scribes*" (Mk 14:53) or similar (Mt 21:45; Lk 22:2; Jn 7:32; Acts 4:5, 23; 22:30).⁷

The implications of this were certainly to be felt by the Hebrews. It was well known that forsaking the Law could lead to your exclusion from religious life (as happened to the blind man in Jn 9:22,34), but the implications for day-to-day life were extensive. Judea in the First Century was unlike Australia in the Twenty-First. Religion was respected. Adherence to Law was held in high esteem. Social position rested largely upon religious persuasion.

Thus, when one fell foul of the Synagogue – or even of the Sanhedrin, as Peter and John did in Acts 4 – the implications could be crippling. No upright Jew wanted to be associated with a traitor or heretic, as the Christians were viewed. For this reason, the Brethren would likely have lost their occupation and other privileges because of their affiliation with Christ. This had been a problem for the Jerusalem Ecclesia even in the early years after the Lord had left. The Ecclesia included a significant number of poor widows (Acts 6:1) and when famine struck, the Brethren had relied upon external support from the Gentile Ecclesias (Acts 11:31). As the Romans closed in on Jerusalem in those final years before AD 70, the tension could only have increased.

In turn, this attitude of society towards the followers of Christ would have translated to pressure from family members to forsake Christianity. The Jewish families would have been embarrassed to have their family name marred by this 'apostasy' from Jewish teaching.

Consequently, when pressure from "the Zealots" is mentioned in these notes, it is worth bearing in mind that this may also have originated from others of the Jewish community and would certainly have translated to coercion from close family members and friends. The Hebrews would have to decide who held greater sway in their lives – Christ or family and friends?

The Destruction of Jerusalem - The Need to Leave

The Lord had prophesied of the destruction of Jerusalem and that the brothers and sisters should leave when it was attacked.

"And when ye shall see Jerusalem compassed with armies, then know that the desolation thereof is nigh. Then let them which are in Judaea flee to the mountains; and let them which are in the midst of it depart out; and let not them that are in the countries enter thereinto." (Luke 21:20-21)

⁵Bruce FF, New Testament History, p.63,65

⁶Bruce FF, New Testament History, p.60-61

⁷Bruce FF, New Testament History, p.78

The brethren must have been puzzled about how this could work. If Jerusalem was compassed with armies, how could one flee? How could one get out of the city during a siege?! However, Yahweh marvellously caused events to fulfil the prophecy. When the Jews began their revolt against Rome in AD 66, Cestius Gallus the Roman Governor of whole region of Syria and Israel responded by coming with an army to quash the rebellion. He besieged Jerusalem and breached the walls and took the outer city. He set up Roman idols inside Jerusalem as prophesied in Matthew 24:15 concerning the abomination of desolation (a term used for idolatry) which Christ had said was to be the signal for the brothers and sisters to leave Jerusalem.

After a siege of nine days, Cestius Gallus then strangely withdrew his army *“without any reason in the world”* (Josephus, *Wars of the Jews*, 2.19.6) – in actual fact, his decision appears to have been based on the loss of siege equipment by ambush and the threatened cutting of his supply lines as the October rains began. As Gallus withdrew, the Zealots pursued the retreating Roman army and inflicted many casualties.

The Zealots felt that their revolt was a success and at last they would be free from the Romans. However, Rome was not going to allow the Zealots to have independence. The following year, in AD 67, the emperor Nero sent Vespasian to lead the Roman army to defeat the revolt. Vespasian started his campaign in the north of Israel and then progressively moved south conquering every city on the way. Before getting to Jerusalem, Vespasian returned to Rome to become Emperor after the death of Nero, giving the brothers and sisters another warning and further time to flee Jerusalem.

Soon after, Vespasian charged his son Titus to besiege and take Jerusalem. The siege of Jerusalem started in March AD 70 and the city was taken in September AD 70. Much of the destruction and loss of life in Jerusalem during the siege was because of the three main parties of the Zealots making war against each other within the city.

The chronology of events around the destruction of Jerusalem is given in the diagram on the following page. This also shows the period of time in which the brothers and sisters had to respond to the warning of the Lord, and the appeal in Hebrews, and leave Jerusalem.

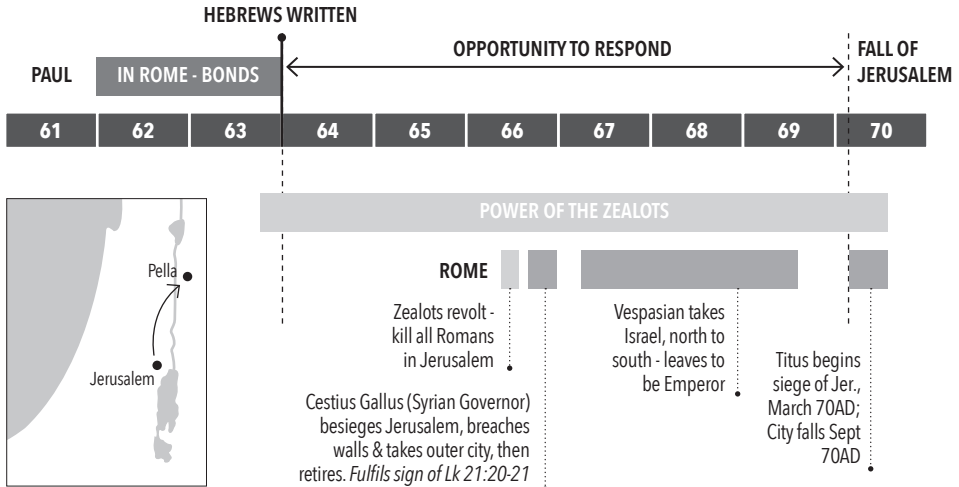
The issue for the brethren was that leaving Jerusalem was not going to be easy. They were very much attached to the city; they loved it. Their feelings are perhaps encapsulated in the words of Psalm 137:5 *“If I forget thee O Jerusalem, let my right hand forget her cunning”*. Was not Jerusalem the place God had chosen to put His name? 2Chronicles 6:6 *“But I have chosen Jerusalem that my name might be there”*. The temple was there. Their relatives and families were there.

Also importantly, if they did leave Jerusalem, where would they go? Jews in many Gentile cities had been persecuted terribly in recent years. For example, in Alexandria where there was a large Jewish community some 50,000 had recently been slaughtered⁸. So where would they go? Hence Paul goes to considerable lengths to show that despite the uncertainty around where they would go, they needed to be ready to leave Jerusalem and not stay:

- 13:13 *“let us go forth unto him without the camp”*
- 13:14 *“for here we have no continuing city”*

⁸Josephus, *Wars of the Jews*, Book 2.495

BACKGROUND TO HEBREWS



The Jewish brethren were confronted with the issue of what it really meant to live by faith. If they left Jerusalem they would have to trust that Yahweh would care for them; that no matter where they might end up, that God would provide for their needs. They would be leaving behind all that was familiar to them and might have to struggle for a living.

Do we live by faith? Or are our roots down in this world, so that we are not quite ready to leave it when Christ comes?

THE URGENCY OF THE TIMES

The time was short in which the brothers and sisters had to heed the Lord's warning through Paul. Bro W F Barling sums up the situation:

"A calamity assailed his readers from which he was determined by every means in his power to save them, ere it was too late. Had it been in fact too late to appeal to them, or were there actually no calamity impending, the letter would never have taken its existing form, or sounded such a note of deep concern. Warning and encouragement – both alike expressed in language instinct with passion – alternate throughout. The letter pulsates with a sense of crisis, and the writer is manifestly straining his powers of persuasion to save his readers from what he considers to be an act of spiritual suicide."

Hebrews – A Thematic Study

The timeline shows that their opportunity to respond to the message was short. They had to be ready to leave in the brief period in the latter part of AD 69. It would appear that Paul's labours in this book were successful. Eusebius (AD 300) in his Ecclesiastical History (3:5) records that:

The whole body, however, of the church at Jerusalem, having been commanded by a divine revelation, given to men of approved piety there before the war, removed from the city, and dwelt at a certain town beyond the Jordan, called Pella."

Epiphanius⁹ records this as well:

“The exodus from Jerusalem was when all the disciples went to live in Pella because Christ had told them to leave Jerusalem and to go away since it would undergo a siege. Because of this advice they lived in Perea after having moved to that place, as I said.”

Note the Lord’s words about leaving Jerusalem in Matthew 24:15-16 *“When ye therefore shall see the abomination of desolation, spoken of by Daniel the prophet, stand in the holy place, (whoso readeth, let him understand); then let them which be in Judaea flee into the mountains”*. The brethren would need to know what Daniel meant in this section to know when to flee. Hence the Lord required them to study their Bibles to know the things of prophecy. This shows the necessity of giving our time and effort to understand the deeper things of the Word, not limiting ourselves to understanding only the first principles.

THE PURPOSE OF HEBREWS 11

The Hebrew brethren needed to take some major steps of faith. They needed to withstand the Zealots and not return to Judaism. They also needed to leave their beloved Jerusalem. This was going to be difficult. Chapter 11 is Paul’s selected examples of faith to help them realise that others amongst God’s people have had to take similar large steps of faith.

The themes of Chapter 11 begin with a quote from Habakkuk 2:3-4, cited in Hebrews 10:37-38. *“He that shall come will come, and will not tarry. Now **the just shall live by faith:** but if any man draw back, my soul shall have no pleasure in him.”* Paul here shows that living by faith is not optional; it is in fact the only way to be acceptable before God.

SECTIONS OF HEBREWS 11

Verse	Subject
1-3	Faith’s Power
4-7	Faith before the Flood
8-21	Faith of the Patriarchs
22-31	Faith leading to the Promised Land
32-40	Faith’s Conquerors, Sufferers & Witnesses
12:1-3	The Greatest Example of Faith

⁹Epiphanius, Panarion 29,7,7-8

THEMES

FAITH

From even a superficial acquaintance with this chapter it is evident that the grand theme is that of faith.

What is faith?

The word translated "faith" in the NT is Gk *pistis*. The word carries a broader meaning than the English word belief. *Pistis* means to believe and to trust; to have a firm conviction.

Thayer – "conviction of the truth of anything, belief"

Bullinger – "firm persuasion, the conviction which is based upon hearing, not upon sight or knowledge; a firm relying confidence"

PATTERNS OF FIVES IN CHAPTER 11

The number five features a number of times in Hebrews 11. There are ten major characters named in two groups – (1) Abel, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Sarah, (2) Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses and Rahab. These are separated into two sets of five by the discourse on strangers and pilgrims in v13-16. In each of these groups there are four men then a woman. Furthermore, there are strong parallels between the characters in the two sets of five as shown in the table below.

v4-12	v17-31	What they have in common
Abel	Isaac	Both are preeminent types of Christ. Both were killed (or nearly killed) for faith.
Enoch	Jacob	Enoch's life was in danger of death from Lamech (discussed later) and Jacob was in fear of Esau for much of his life.
Noah	Joseph	Both acted to save their families.
Abraham	Moses	Both left where they were born and sojourned the rest of their lives.
Sarah	Rahab	Sarah had to wait to conceive. Rahab had to wait to be saved.

 Why this apparent focus on the number five?

PROMISES

The promises are a key theme. Obtaining that which is promised is based on Faith not Law:

- v9 "sojourned in the land of **promise**"
- v9 "heirs with him of the same **promise**"
- v11 "judged him worthy who had **promised**"
- v13 "not having received the **promises**"
- v17 "he that had received the **promises**"
- v33 "obtained **promises**"
- v39 "received not the **promise**"

WITNESS

The Greek word for "witness" is *martureo* and means "to bear witness, to give testimony." It is derived from word *martus*, meaning "a witness". The word is not uniformly translated in

Hebrews 11 (KJV) and so the theme is obscured in the English. The faithful witnessed to their faith by the things they did by faith.

- 11:2 "good report"
- 11:4 "witness" & "testifying"
- 11:5 "testimony"
- 11:39 "good report"
- 12:1 "witnesses" (Gk *martus*)

BETTER

This is really a theme of the whole of Hebrews that is also present in Hebrews 11. The idea of the word "better" is "much, much better". It is the better way of living in Christ and the things associated with Christ – faith and grace – compared with that of living by the Law of Moses and the associated emphasis on works and sacrifices.

Aspect	Reference
Better than the angels	1:4
Better response by believers	6:9
Better priesthood	7:7
Better hope	7:19
Better covenant	7:22, 8:6
Better promises	8:6
Better sacrifices	9:23
Better reward	10:34
Better country	11:16
Better resurrection	11:35
Better thing	11:40
Better blood sprinkling	12:24

LIVING BY FAITH

The examples of faithful people in Hebrews 11 are all characterised by faith in action. Faith was the power that enabled the faithful to achieve things beyond their natural ability. Some of the issues of living by faith are:

True faith is not blind faith.

The churches often teach a blind faith, but the Bible teaches that faith must be grounded on a firm foundation – Rom 10:17 "*faith cometh by hearing and hearing by the word of God.*"

It's not necessarily easy.

A common misconception is that if we step out in faith, God will clear the path of life before for us; that He will clear away all the obstacles and give a smooth path to go on. In fact, the opposite is true. Although God blessed all the faithful in Hebrews 11, He did not clear the path of life before them. Quite to the contrary, He gave them trials to test their faith. Every one of them had major trials of their faith.

"Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you: But rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ's sufferings; that, when his glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy." 1Pet 4:12-13.

Acting in faith does not guarantee deliverance.

Through faith, Daniel's three friends withstood Nebuchadnezzar's demand to worship his image, irrespective of the consequences in this life: *"If it be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and He will deliver us out of thine hand, O king. **But if not**, be it known unto thee, O king, that we will not serve thy gods, nor worship the golden image which thou hast set up"* (Dan 3:17-18). These men made a decision based on Biblical principles, then resolved to stick to this decision, come what may.

Hebrews 11 lists not only those who conquered through faith, but also those who suffered or died for their faith, leaving an amazing witness to others of a belief and trust in Yahweh.

Without faith it is impossible to please God.

Every saint will have to develop faith and undergo tests of faith, as our belief in God only has true value if it remains constant despite hard times. (Heb 11:6.)

It is possible to have faith without works.

Eg: King Agrippa believed but refused to let that belief show in faithful actions – Acts 26:23-28. It was an ineffective faith which did not result in action. As James says, *"faith without works is dead"* (ie: a corpse) (Jas 2:20).

Faith comes from studying God's word.

"Faith cometh by hearing and hearing by the word of God" (Rom 10:17). Some suggest that 'life's experiences' or the trials we face in life produce faith. The Bible does not teach this. The one source from which we can gain faith is the Word of God. Trials then test this faith and build character.

Faith will diminish unless constantly re-invigorated.

We need to *"give the more earnest heed to the things which we have heard, lest at any time we should let them slip (run out as leaking vessels)"* (Heb 2:1).

Faith can easily be lost. Moses sent 12 spies to investigate the promised land and report back. The report of just 10 unfaithful men destroyed the faith of a nation of over a million people! The carcasses of Israel fell in the wilderness in testimony to their lack of faith. How important is it then for the Godly to nurture their living faith.

Faith is unbelievably powerful!

"This is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith" (1 John 5:4).

From the above it is evident that it is through the Word alone that we gain faith, and that such faith can diminish unless constantly renewed from the Word. A steady diet of the Word of God is vital for us to build our faith and so to overcome the world.

WHAT HEBREWS 11 IS NOT

IT IS NOT - THE FAITHFUL'S HALL OF FAME

Hebrews 11 is often seen as the defining catalogue of the faithful down through the ages. This is not the case. The problem arises when we study the chapter on its own – isolated from the broader context of Hebrews. Paul has selected examples of faithful people whose circumstances were similar to that of the Hebrews. Individuals whose circumstances were not relevant to the Hebrews are left out. As a result, we find some very faithful people are not here. Some of these are:

- Melchisedek – Paul refers to him in Hebrews 7 but not here.
- Joshua – faithful spy in Num 13 and later led the nation to conquer the land by faith.
- Caleb – faithful spy in Num 13 and later defeated the giants of Hebron to take this as his inheritance, by faith.
- Rebekah (wife of Isaac) – who left home to go with Abraham's servant whom she had never met before into the promised land to be married to a man she had never met.
- Hezekiah, Josiah and other faithful Kings and Prophets in the period of the Monarchy.

By noting these omissions in the list of the faithful, it becomes evident that examples of faith concerning conquering the land or warding off invaders are not included. This is because Paul wants his readers to leave Jerusalem and likely leave the land, not stay in Jerusalem.

IT IS NOT - THE GREATEST EXAMPLES OF FAITH

The actions of faith taken by the characters in Hebrews 11 are sometimes represented as being the greatest examples of faith in those people's lives. This is not quite right. In many cases major incidents of faith are missed out. For example:

Abraham

Elsewhere in Scripture, Abraham is renowned for the faith he demonstrated in believing God's promise of Genesis 15:5-6:

"And He brought him forth abroad, and said, Look now toward heaven, and tell the stars, if thou be able to number them: and He said unto him, So shall thy seed be. And he believed in the LORD; and He counted it to him for righteousness".

This example of faith is quoted in Romans 4:2-3 & Gal 3:8. Why then is this missing in Hebrews 11? Because it is an example of faith which did not require **action** on Abraham's behalf. Paul did not want his readers to think that in all cases faith does not require action by them. Instead, he cites the leaving of his homeland, the sojourning of Abraham in a strange land, and the offering up of his own family in God's service, and the belief in the resurrection and reward of a better city, each of which was pertinent to the situation of the Hebrews.

Joseph

The story of Joseph is full of his faith. He maintained faith in Egypt despite being a slave in Potiphar's house, estranged from his family and friends. When falsely accused by Potiphar's wife he ended up in prison. He still maintained his faith. When before Pharaoh he witnessed to Yahweh by faith. There are other examples too. In Hebrews 11 the only reference to Joseph is about his death-bed request for his bones to be taken back into the land when the Israelites returned there. Joseph believed that – even though he might die outside the land – one day God would bring him home.

IT IS NOT - THE RECOUNTING OF THE HISTORY OF ISRAEL'S ANCESTORS

It is important to remember that Paul is not telling the Hebrew brethren stories of the past that they did not know. These brethren would know the history of their ancestors well. Further it needs to be remembered that these Hebrews knew the Old Testament well. They would be able to recognise phrases quoted from the Scriptures instantly. Hence it is the way in which Paul recounts and summarises key stories of the past that is key to understanding this chapter.

- He selects incidents which parallel aspects of their own circumstances (such as the need to leave Zion); and
- He uses key words and phrases that are allusions to Old Testament references that also have a bearing on the issues and dilemmas facing the Hebrew brethren.

WHY QUOTE THE SEPTUAGINT?

All the Old Testament citations in the book of Hebrews are from the Septuagint (LXX) Greek version of the Old Testament, a translation compiled around 200BC by 70 Hebrew scholars in Alexandria.

It does appear strange that in writing to the Hebrews Paul should use the LXX! Why not quote the Hebrew text to Hebrew brothers and sisters?

The answer appears to be that copies of the Hebrew bible were too expensive for ordinary people to afford. In contrast, copies of the LXX were relatively cheap having been produced by slave labour. This is borne out in the following quote:

'From the extreme labour and care bestowed on them, Hebrew manuscripts of the Bible were enormously dear ... out of the reach of most people ...the Greek Version (Septuagint) of the old testament was the "people's bible". ... Hundreds of slaves were engaged to copy what one dictated.'

Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah,
Alfred Edersheim, Book 1, Chap 2

So, it would appear the average brother or sister in the Jerusalem Ecclesia would use the LXX. Consequently, the OT quotes in the epistle to the Hebrews are from the LXX, although they are sometimes slightly modified. This is similar to our situation with English versions of the Bible which we use, but which we will modify some verses a little because of known defects in the translation.



FAITH'S POWER

CHAPTER 11: 1-3

USING THESE NOTES

From this point the notes turn to consider Hebrews 11 verse by verse. Each section of verses is preceded by a question box, designed to help us think more closely about this chapter. Each verse is then printed from the KJV text, after which the key words are briefly reviewed, with the Greek word noted together with the Strong's number and a definition of the meaning of the word. Where the source is not mentioned for these word meanings, a combination of Strong's Concordance and Thayer's and Bullinger's Lexicons and Vine's Dictionary have been used. After this there is exposition of each key phrase in each verse.

KEY ABBREVIATIONS

mg = margin

s/w = same word

Heb = Hebrew

Gk = Greek

Vine = Vine's Expository Dictionary

Thay. = Thayer's Lexicon

Str. = Strong's Concordance

Bull. = Bullinger's Lexicon

Cp = compare

OT = Old Testament

NT = New Testament

LXX = The Septuagint OT

THINKING AHEAD (v1-3)

- Can you find some good alternative translations that help give the sense of v1?
- What is a "good report"? Where else is this found in Hebrews 11? Is it found elsewhere in Scripture?
- Why does God value faith so much?
- Find and colour in Heb 11:
 - "Faith"
 - Actions which were accomplished by faith, such as accounting, looking, esteeming, choosing etc.
 - "Seen" or "saw"

FAITH'S POWER

1 *Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.*

- Faith** *pistis*" (4102) – The noun equivalent of verb "*pisteuo*" (4100) to believe.
- Substance** "*hupostasis*" (5287) – Thayer: "A setting or placing under, thing put under, that which has foundation, is firm
- Hoped for** "*elpizo*" (1680) – verb equivalent of the noun "*elpis*" = Hope
- Evidence** "*elegchos*" (1650) – a proof, that by which a thing is proved or tested

This verse is often seen as a definition of faith. In a way it is, however it is more defining what faith does rather than what faith is. This matches with the chapter that follows – a long string of examples of what faith has achieved in the life of its adherents.

Some have tried to make a distinction between "faith" and "belief" as though faith was a higher form of belief. The Scriptures draw no such difference. The words for *faith* and *believe* / *belief* are exactly the same throughout the New Testament.

The importance of a living and active faith can hardly be over-stressed. Faith is *really* believing what God says and letting that direct our actions and choices. As stated in the Introduction (page 4), ever since the beginning of the world, the question has been, *do we really believe what God says?*

FAITH & HUMANISM

In the age in which we live Faith is being challenged more and more. The ethos of our world is *Humanism*, and this philosophy has no room for faith. *Faith* believes in God's ability; *Humanism* believes in our own. Humanism is all about depending on self, whereas faith is all about depending on God.

God did not create us to be self-sufficient. We are reliant upon Him for our daily bread. We are reliant upon Him and His Son for salvation from sin and death. Humanism erodes this, and so much more, as illustrated by the next quote.

"A humanist is more than just an unbeliever. The consequences of his unbelief are that man is alone in the universe, without a God and without an after-life; that if man is to survive he not only can but must accept responsibility for his own destiny; and that only by making full use of the arts and sciences, of the

genius of individuals, and of the best resources of social co-operation, can man hope to overcome the evils of ignorance, poverty and disease, and the hazards of war and the population explosion. If a humanist is prepared to shoulder the consequences of his unbelief, he becomes personally committed to the solution of the problems of mankind.” (Ian Edwards, A Humanist View, p.XIV,XV)¹⁰

We may not see the humanist mentality so strikingly displayed within our Community, but are we perceptive enough to notice it when it affects our thinking or decisions in smaller

“Faith is the substance of things hoped for”

The essential meaning of this is simple. The word translated *substance* really means *foundation*. It is saying that **faith is the foundation for hope**. This is logical – if we are to hope for something, we must first believe that it will actually happen.

“the evidence of things not seen”

Faith makes the unseen real – in relation to the past, present and future.

- **Past:** Faith is the proof or assurance that things recorded in the Word of God as happening long ago actually did happen. Once we believe that God's Word is true, then we have confidence that Abraham really did receive promises, that Israel really crossed over the Red Sea on dry land etc. This lays the basis for us to imagine and appreciate these scenes, and in turn leads to them impacting our lives today.
- **Present:** Faith also makes the existence of the unseen Father in the heavens real. In v27 it says that Moses endured “*as seeing him who is invisible (not seen)*”. Moses’ decision to leave Pharaoh’s court made no sense to his contemporaries; but he was motivated by an appreciation of the active involvement in his life of One whom neither he, nor they, could see.
- **Future:** Faith also makes the unseen future real. In v7 it says that Noah was “*warned of God of things not seen*”. He had never seen a flood, yet through faith the coming of the flood was real to him.

2 For by it the elders obtained a good report.

Elders “*presbuteros*” (4245) – a senior, advanced in life. Reference to men of past ages. They are the cloud of witnesses in 12:2

Obtained a good report This is one Gk word - “*martureo*” (3140) – to be a witness, bear witness, affirm that one has seen or heard or experienced something

The faithful of past generations bore witness to the things of God through faith. The Hebrew brethren needed to maintain their stand for Christ against the Zealots. The power for this is faith, not law.

The theme of the martyr – the faithful witness for Christ – is introduced here at the start of the chapter. What will follow is a catalogue of individuals whose faith drove them to witness to Christ – both in word and deed – come what may. *Martus*, together with its root word *martureo*, occurs

¹⁰Cited by Carl Parry in Humanism – The Danger Defined, The Lampstand (1997), vol 3, no. 2, <https://thelampstand.com.au/humanism-the-danger-defined/>

in Heb 11:2,4(x2),5,39; 12:1. The English word *martyr*, “a person who is killed because of their religious or other beliefs”¹¹ is taken from this Greek word for witness, illustrating the extent to which these men and women were prepared to hold to the message they carried.

- Those in past ages obtained a commendable witness before God (v2)
- God witnessed to Abel’s righteousness (v4)
- Enoch held the witness that “*he pleased God*” (v5)
- All the faithful obtained their witness through faith (v39)
- They are described as “*a cloud of witnesses*” (12:1) – a group of individuals who were prepared to witness to what they believed, even to the point of becoming a martyr.

3 *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.*

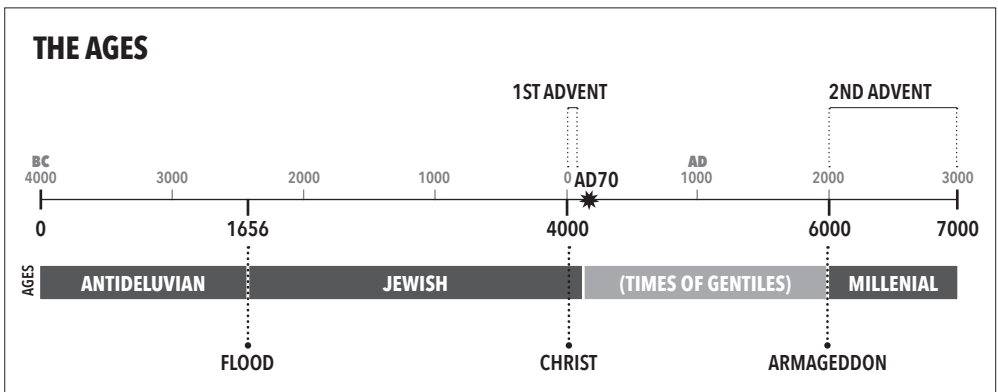
Worlds “*aion*” (165) – period of time, ages
Framed “*katartizo*” (2675) – to render ie: to fit, sound, complete, to order, to arrange
Word “*rhema*” (4487) – denotes that which is spoken (Vine).

Diag: “*In faith we perceive that the ages have been so thoroughly adjusted by God’s command*”

The Greek word for “worlds” is *aion*. As noted above, this refers to “ages or periods of time”, not the literal earth. It is interesting, however, that when God made the literal world, he gave short, spoken statements and these were immediately fulfilled, resulting in the Created world (Gen 1:3; Psa 33:6). Paul seems to use this imagery to describe the framing of the ages of mankind’s existence ever since – God spoke, and it was done.

The word *aion* in the New Testament is often translated “ever” in the sense of a prolonged or indefinite time period, or “world” in the sense of the current era. So Paul is saying that the *aions*, or “ages”, were arranged by the Word of God. What does he mean?

This title, “the ages”, is applied in Scripture to selected periods of history, as Bro Thomas points out in *Eureka*. There is the **Antediluvian Age** (the era before the flood – ‘ante’ = before, ‘diluvian’ = *the deluge*), the **Jewish Age** (from Abraham to AD70) and the **Millennial Age** (yet to come). The period we are living in today is referred to as the “times of the Gentiles”, as illustrated below.



¹¹ Oxford Dictionary

This comment – that the ages were arranged by the Word of God – is therefore most significant to the Hebrews. They stood right at the end of an “age” (Heb 1:2; 9:26 world = s/w “aion”). The Jewish world was soon to implode with the Roman invasion of AD 70. Their lives would change in a way they had never seen before. So Paul reassures the brethren that God has everything under control – He has arranged the ages according to His plan, revealed in His word.

History is not the accidental occurrence of a series of unplanned epochs of time; it is the fulfilment of God’s carefully crafted masterplan, unveiled in His Word by the Prophets. This is frequently attested to in Scripture. For example, see Jer 25:9-11; Dan 2; Lk 21:24; Rom 11:25.

“so that things which are seen were not made of things which do appear.”

What does this mean?

This is not clearly translated. It means that the things that could be seen at the time Hebrews was written were not the logical product of the things which had happened in prior ages. Successive ages are not simply the natural continuation of the previous order of things. They are governed by God’s prophetic utterances, not by chance or the natural course of events.

At the end of each age there were major changes. The message for the Hebrews was that they stood at the end of the Jewish age; the order of things existing in their time was not going to continue. ‘What had always been’ may not continue too much longer. They had to prepare for the change.

Similarly, we stand at the end of the times of Gentiles. Christ will usher in a new age - the Millennial - which will be radically different to our times. We are preparing for a change never seen before in our times... or in fact in the history of mankind. Our hearts must not be attached to this world – the times of Gentile dominance are coming to a close.

THINKING AHEAD (v4-7)

- Why is the story of Cain and Abel the first example for the Hebrews? Wasn’t Cain just ‘bad’ and Abel ‘good’? Why was Abel’s offering such an outstanding act of faith?
- How is Abel “yet speaking”? What is he saying whilst dead?
- What is “translation”?
- Any thoughts on when the speech of Enoch in Jude v14-15 could have been delivered, and to whom it was directed?
- In v7 what was the “fear” Noah felt? How can we be moved with fear and faith at the same time? Is there any fear motivating our faith?



FAITH BEFORE
THE FLOOD

CHAPTER 11:4-7

ABEL

4 *By faith Abel offered unto God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, by which he obtained witness that he was righteous, God testifying of his gifts: and by it he being dead yet speaketh.*

More excellent "*pleion*" (4119) – greater in quality, superior, greater in quantity

Sacrifice "*thusia*" (2378) – used of negative offerings - sin offerings and trespass offerings (Heb 5:1)

Gifts "*doron*" (1435) – used of positive offerings, burnt and peace offerings

Obtained Witness "*martureo* (3140)" – same word as used in V2

Testifying "*martureo*" (3140) – same word again

It would appear from the Greek words for sacrifice and gifts noted above that Abel offered both negative offerings (sin and trespass) together with the positive offerings (burnt and peace) seeking fellowship with God.

THE OFFERINGS OF CAIN & ABEL

In Genesis there is more detail of what happened. In Genesis 4:3 it says that "*in process of time*" (KJV *mg. at the end of days*). This implies an appointed day for offering to God; perhaps an annual event or special occasion. Cain brought of the fruit of the ground. He wanted to worship God his way, despite the clear implication that an offering involving bloodshed was required. Abel, on the other hand, "*brought of the firstlings of his flock*" (Gen 4:4). Abel understood the principles involved. This was a blood offering and the firstling, which indicates he accepted that the firstborn belongs to God – Num 18:15-17.

The offerings of Abel as described in Genesis 4 are just like the offerings under the Law of Moses. It is interesting, however, that in *Hebrews 11* Abel is described as making these offerings *by faith*, rather than simply obeying the Law, like the Jews in the First Century.

The faith of Abel stands out in bold relief when we consider the context in which he brought his offering. Cain was a self-willed man – he brought his own offering with no regard to God's requirements (Gen 4:3-7; cp Jude v11). He was also clearly a strong and violent man. Abel's offering was brought to God completely irrespective of these circumstances. His simple approach was, '*What does God want me to do?... That's what I will do.*' The Hebrews could certainly learn from this!

CAIN KILLS ABEL

The story of Cain killing Abel falls into the immediate context of the events of the Fall and the curse of Gen 3:15: **“I will put enmity between thee and the woman and between thy seed and her seed”.**



Not only does this verse state there is enmity between the two seeds, but also that this enmity is placed **by God**, and man cannot therefore take it away, try though he might.

As Bro Thomas wrote in *Elpis Israel*:

*“The history of this period is a striking illustration of the ‘enmity’ (Gen. 3:15) **God has put** between the seed of the Serpent, and the seed of the woman... There can be no friendship between these parties. Death or victory is the only alternative. There can be no peace in the world till one or other be suppressed. The “enmity” is the essential hostility betwixt sin and God’s law, which is the truth. Either truth must conquer sin, or sin must abolish the truth; but compromise there can be none.”*

Elpis Israel (4th Edition), The Great Red Dragon, p.104.

Hence, we are reminded that we are in a war against sin. It is a war between us and the world (James 4:4), and a battle which is within us as well (Rom 7:21-23). We must strive to have the thinking of the Seed of the Woman as the guiding principle of our lives.

In the death of Abel at the hands of Cain there is also a type of Christ:

Abel	Christ
Eve, not Adam, mentioned in Gen 4:2, implying Abel is “the seed of the woman” of Gen 3:15 (see also 4:25)	The Seed of the Woman (Gal 4:4)
Keeper of sheep (Gen 4:2)	The Good Shepherd (Jn 10:11,14)
Pleased God (Gen 4:4)	My beloved son... well pleased (Mt 3:17)
Brought firstling (Gen 4:4)	First-fruits to God (1Cor 15:20, Col 1:15)
“Righteous” (Mt 23:35) – Not worthy of death	Sinless - Not worthy of death (Lk 23:14-15)
Cain killed Abel because he knew Abel’s gift was better (1Jn 3:12)	Jews killed Christ because of envy (Mt 27:18)
His blood cried out for vengeance (Gen 4:10)	The blood of sprinkling, that speaketh better things than that of Abel (Heb 12:24).

WHAT WAS CAIN’S CORE PROBLEM?

Cain’s core problem was a lack of faith. It was not as though Cain was entirely irreligious; he brought an offering to God. His lack of faith is however evidenced by his words to the angel. Gen 4:13 (mg) *“Mine iniquity is greater than it may be forgiven”.* He considered his sin too big to be forgivable. He clearly thought in terms of law not faith.

In legal terms,

- Sin = debt.
- I make up for my sin with effort (eg: sacrifices) to pay off my sins.

But this is defective thinking; sins are impossible to pay off. This is where the failure of Law thinking is clearly evident. The truth is that we can never repay God for our sins. Through faith, however, no matter the size of the sin, forgiveness is available, even though there may still be significant conditions and consequences to be endured.

THE LESSON FOR THE HEBREWS

The story of Cain and Abel held many lessons for the Hebrews.

Abel was a man who obeyed God implicitly – whether or not he knew the entire rationale behind God’s command. Like him, the Hebrews needed to hold fast to Christ despite the potentially violent aggression they would face at the hands of the Zealots. And finally, they needed to know that, even if they died in their witness to Christ, God would remember them – by their faithful witness, *‘they, being dead, would yet speak’*.

ENOCH

5 *By faith Enoch was translated that he should not see death; and was not found, because God had translated him: for before his translation he had this testimony, that he pleased God.*

translated *“metatithemi”* (3346) – transpose, transfer. Used Acts 7:16 of bones of Jacob and sons being “carried over” from Egypt to Shechem for burial.

“Enoch was translated that he should not see death”

Reading this passage in isolation it could be concluded that Enoch was taken away from the earth *“that he should not see death”* and continues to live in some other realm. The churches teach that Enoch was taken to heaven. This is clearly wrong as the word “translated” is not used of going up to heaven, but of being transferred from one place to another (as in Acts 7:16). That Enoch is not still alive is evident from v13: *“these **all** died in faith”*. Cp v39.

The circumstance of Enoch’s life can be pieced together from the narrative of Genesis 5 and from Jude. In Jude 14 -15 Enoch is described as the 7th from Adam and as contending against the wicked in most strident terms

“And Enoch also, the seventh from Adam, prophesied of these, saying, Behold, the Lord cometh with ten thousands of his saints, To execute judgment upon all, and to convince all that are ungodly among them of all their ungodly deeds which they have ungodly committed, and of all their hard speeches which ungodly sinners have spoken against him.”

In the diagram Enoch is shown to be the 7th from Adam in the line of the Woman’s seed, and Lamech is the 7th from Adam in the line of the Serpent’s seed. It is therefore likely that Lamech and his supporters were the very men with whom Enoch was contending. Lamech was an evil

man and is described in Genesis 4:19-23 as the first polygamist, the inventor of weapons of war and a man ready to kill others.

Enoch evidently faced the threat of being murdered by Lamech because of the warning message he preached. Lamech had boasted to his wives, *"I have (or would – KJV mg) slain a man to my wounding, and a young man to my hurt"* (Gen 4:23). It would appear that God translated (shifted) Enoch to some other location on the earth so that he *"should not see death"* at the hands of Lamech. Thus we have in the life of Enoch another demonstration of the enmity between the Seed of the Serpent and the Seed of the Woman.

KEY ISSUES FOR US:

1. As Paul was encouraging the Hebrews to witness against the evil of the Zealots in their day, we need to be witnessing to the world around us of its evil ways and God's coming judgments. If this ends up being a sharp contention, so be it.

2. The circumstance of Abel contending with Cain, and Enoch contending with Lamech, are almost identical. But why then did God allow Abel to be killed by Cain, yet translated Enoch away so that Lamech could not kill him? Why should one be allowed to die and not the other?

There may be an answer in the circumstances in which each of these men lived:

- The murder of Abel demonstrated the acute enmity between the seeds, and his death prefigured the death of the Lord Jesus Christ.
- On the contrary, Enoch may have been preserved to strengthen the Seed of the Woman who were already in the minority in the times leading up to the Flood.

But really, the answer is simple: Because that is how God chose it should be, and He knows best.

A similar issue arises today. Why do some young brethren or sisters have their life cut short while others live on for a normal life span? Sometimes the hand of God can be seen in these tragedies at a much later time. Often however we don't know why.

Imagine if everyone that was baptised as a Christadelphian never had bad things happen to them. Suddenly there would be millions of people pressing into the Truth... but for all the wrong motives. Furthermore, premature deaths of brethren or sisters can be a compelling witness to others, providing encouragement to others and a strong witness to the truth of the Gospel.

"because God had translated him"

The writer to the Hebrews, having in Enoch provided a second example of someone who withstood evil people in their day, now moves to begin talking about people who had to leave their familiar surroundings and go to an unknown place. The text reads that God translated Enoch, but we can miss the impact of this. God removed Enoch away from Lamech, but that would also mean being removed away from his family and associations too. This is exactly what the Hebrews were now being asked to do.

“he had this testimony, that he pleased God”

The Hebrew text of the record of Enoch in Genesis 5:22 says that “*Enoch walked with God*”. However here in Hebrews it is that “he pleased God”, which follows the Septuagint (LXX) Greek OT. Although these are different expressions, they are not contradictory. If one walks with God one, they must be pleasing to God. Amos asks, “*How can two walk together except they be agreed*” (Amos 3:3).

There is another set of allusions being picked up in the expression “*he pleased God.*” When the Lord was baptised, there was a voice from heaven saying, “*this is my beloved son in whom I am well pleased*” (Matt 3:17)¹². Also, at the Lord’s transfiguration the same words were said; “*This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; hear ye him.*” (Matt 17:5).

Like Enoch, our Lord withstood the evil men of his day and upheld God’s righteousness. This is what the Hebrews were being encouraged to do too. However, unlike Enoch, our Lord was not translated that he should not see death; he suffered a violent death that declared God’s righteousness. Now God was graciously offering the Hebrews to be taken away from destruction at the hands of the Zealots or the Romans, a concession His own perfect Son was not permitted.

THE IMPORTANCE OF FAITH

6 *But without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him.*

Enoch “*pleased God*” in opposing the ungodliness of the people of his day, and by implication so should the Hebrews withstand the evil of the Zealots and not return to the Law. The Hebrews perhaps did not see that the Zealots were so evil as they were keen for the Law and were zealous for Israel. Paul is quick to remind the Hebrews that it is only through faith that one can please God. Here he is alluding back to the quote from Habakkuk 2:4, cited in chapter 10:37 “*the just shall live by faith*”.

In the second half of the verse Paul is dealing with the apathy of some of Hebrews toward the things of God. He reminds them that those who diligently seek God will be rewarded with life eternal. By implication, those who do not diligently seek God may not have a reward. Cp. Jer 29:13 “*And ye shall seek me, and find me, when ye shall search for me with all your heart.*” Despite the apathy of the world around us we should be diligent in seeking God, as the Psalmist says, “*with my whole heart have I sought thee*” (Psa 119:10).

Some brothers and sisters struggle with the idea of wanting the reward of eternal life with total happiness in the Kingdom of God on the basis that this is really selfishness. However, it is not selfishness to want this reward. Wanting to be in the kingdom does not exclude anyone else from being in the kingdom. This verse in Hebrews is a proof of this. It teaches we should believe that God is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him. Hence looking for that reward is not wrong.

¹²The Gk word used for “pleased” in Matt 3:17 & 17:5 is a stronger word for “pleased” than in Heb 11:5 of Enoch. Nevertheless the connection between the two is indicated.

NOAH

Having looked at the examples of Abel and Enoch who contended against those around them in their own day, Paul moves on to consider examples of people that had to leave the familiar and go by faith to the unknown. This is of course what the Hebrews had to do. They had to leave Jerusalem, their beloved city, and go to destinations unknown.

7 *By faith Noah, being warned of God of things not seen as yet, moved with fear, prepared an ark to the saving of his house; by the which he condemned the world, and became heir of the righteousness which is by faith.*

Warned of God "*chrematizo*" (5537) – to advise or consult or instruct. Cp its usage elsewhere:

Mt 2:12 *"And being **warned of God** in a dream that they should not return to Herod, they departed into their own country another way".*

Acts 10:22 *"Cornelius the centurion... was **warned from God** by an holy angel to send for thee into his house"*

Lk 2:26 *"And it was **revealed** unto him by the Holy Ghost, that he should not see death, before he had seen the Lord's Christ".*

Moved with fear "*eulabeomai*" (2125) – to beware, reverence, stand in awe. Only other occ. is

Acts 23:10 *"the chief captain, **fearing** lest Paul should have been pulled in pieces of them"*

"Being warned of God"

Noah was warned of God that the flood was coming in Genesis 6:13: *"And God said unto Noah, 'The end of all flesh is come before me; for the earth is filled with violence through them; and, behold, I will destroy them with the earth.'"* The Hebrews were warned of the destruction of Jerusalem by Christ in Luke 20:20-21. Would they heed this warning? Would they prepare to leave as Noah prepared to leave? God is warning us that Christ is about to return and judge the world. Will we heed the warning and prepare for that day, or will we largely ignore it because we want to enjoy life instead?

"things not seen as yet"

The expression "*things not seen*" is picked up from v1 in the statement of what faith will do. Noah had never seen anything like what God had said He was going to do. In fact, nobody had! There was no precedent. The flood was the first time God's judgments had come since Creation, and in addition to this, nobody had even seen rain before, let alone a flood!¹³

Most people just did not believe that after 1656 years that God would actually judge their lawless society. Despite this Noah heeded the warning and got ready to save his house. To accomplish that, he began building an enormous boat in the middle of the dry land. Imagine the scornful looks and ridicule of which he must have become the victim!

¹³The first time rain is mentioned is during the flood Gen 7:11-12. Prior to this we only read of "a mist" watering the earth 2:5-6. Both rain and the rainbow appear to have been introduced during Noah's lifetime.

But though there was no precedent for the flood Noah faced, for the Hebrews there were plenty. Jerusalem had fallen before. Nebuchadnezzar's invasion and the Babylonian captivity was just one of these precedents. Would they prepare like Noah did? Are we preparing for God's judgments on this world? We have the benefit of 6000 years of history to know that God will judge evil. Are we ready for Christ coming?

God's instruction to Noah to build the ark and go into it with his family was a very real test of faith. Consider the following issues:

- How would there be a flood? Can mist lead to a flood?!
- Noah could not test the ark before the flood came – what if it leaked?
- Would the ark be strong enough in storms to not break up?
- Would it be stable enough to avoid capsizing?
- How would they cope with all these animals on the ark?
- How long would they be on the ark?
- Where would the ark take them to?
- How would they live after the flood? There would be no one else to trade with, to talk with etc.
- What about any friends or family members that would be left behind?

Thinking about these issues makes it plain that Noah and his family had to rely upon their strong faith that Yahweh would preserve them safely.

“moved with fear”

Noah feared Yahweh and his Word. Proverbs 9:10 informs us that *“the fear of Yahweh is the beginning of wisdom”*. (See also Psa 111:10, Prov 1:7). Who did the Hebrews fear? The Zealots? The Romans? Their extended Jewish families that wanted them to stay in Jerusalem? Or Christ?

Who do we fear? To whom do we show reverence? If we don't speak up about what we believe when we are with the world, who does it show that we reverence? Cp. 1Pet 3:12-15.

“prepared an ark”

Salvation requires preparatory work. An ecclesia which can help brothers and sisters to salvation takes much work to build. The Hebrews needed to prepare their ecclesia for the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70 so that they would be ready to leave the city. Today, ecclesias need to prepare for the return of Christ so that brothers and sisters are safe inside away from the world. Cf 1Pet 3:18-20; 4:1,7-8.

“he condemned the world”

How did Noah “condemn the world” by preparing an Ark? He built an enormous boat that was evidence of his belief that Yahweh would destroy the earth. No one could miss it! In the same way, Christ said that the men of Nineveh would condemn the Jewish world of his day (Mt 12:41-42). The men of Nineveh repented at the preaching of Jonah, but the men of Christ's day had a much greater sign in the appearance and warnings of Messiah. The Jewish world would reject their warning just like the men of Noah's day. The question was, what would the brethren do?

“heir of the righteousness which is by faith”

Noah demonstrated his faith, so God imputed righteousness to him. The expression *‘righteousness by faith’* alludes to the experience of Abraham whom God *‘counted righteous’* in Genesis 15:6. This concept is thus a bridging phrase to introduce the next character.

THE 3-STEP PROCESS IS THE PROCESS OF LIVING FAITH

With each new example of faith that is presented in this chapter there are additional principles of faith interwoven into the text. With the example of Noah, the critically important principle of how a living faith can be developed is presented in the 3-step process as illustrated in the table below.

Step	V8 details	Nature of the action	V13 Principle	Greek Voice for v13 verbs
1	Being warned of God	Mental	Persuasion	Passive voice – something done to you
2	Moved with fear	Moral	Embracing	Middle voice ¹⁴ – something done to oneself
3	Prepared an ark	Physical	Confession (better profession by actions)	Active voice – something one does to others

There are several things to note about this:

MENTAL, MORAL, PHYSICAL SEQUENCE

The sequence of mental, then moral, then physical is also the sequence of God Manifestation. This sequence is illustrated in the design of the tabernacle. The outer court represents God manifestation as a mental process – mentally accepting God's word leading to baptism. The Holy Place represents life in Christ, manifesting God morally in our lives. The most Holy place represents eternal life in the kingdom – manifesting God physically in a perfect body free from the shackles of sinful fleshly nature.

PERSUADED, EMBRACED AND PROFESSED SEQUENCE

This sequence, which is initially presented in the example of Noah, and is expanded upon in the example of Abraham (v13), tells us *how* we can develop a living and active faith.

Persuasion

This is the first step of faith. It is something done to us (Gk passive voice) by the Word of God. This comes from reading the Bible: *"So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God."* (Rom 10:17). For example, when we study the Bible, and realise that God has amazingly predicted so many things long before they happened (such as the restoration of Israel to their ancient Land), we begin to *believe* the other things God has written, i.e. we have *faith* in His Word. However, if we stop there and don't progress any further, then we have a dead faith. A dead faith – being persuaded of the Truth but not acting upon it – is very possible. E.g. Felix (Acts 24:25), Festus (Acts 26:24-28), James 2:20 *"faith without works is dead"*.

Embracing

The second step is something done to oneself (Gk middle voice). This is a vital step for having a living faith. In the example of Noah, it is encapsulated in the words *"moved with fear"* (one Greek verb). This summarises the thinking process of Noah having been warned of God about the flood. Noah evaluated what God had said and thought through the consequences. He realised

¹³English does not have a middle voice, hence the concept can appear quite foreign to us.

the enormity of the destruction God had foreshadowed. He contemplated the consequences for his family (even though it is likely he didn't even have children at this point) – they need saving from this calamity. His thoughts generated a moral reaction – a fear of what is coming – and then he made a conscious informed decision that he would do what God has said.

For Christadelphians, young people and older brothers and sisters alike, there is the risk this step of moral thinking does not happen. We can hear a Current Events talk that shows prophecy is being fulfilled before our eyes (eg: Brexit, Russia in Syria becoming King of the North) but not think through 'what does this mean for me?'. How can this happen? Christadelphian life is busy and full of event after event. We can roll along from one to the next without giving ourselves meditation time to evaluate what all this means for ourselves. This is when faith can become living. When we take on board that Christ is really coming, and that he will bring judgement on the earth, we decide we need to align our lives with that reality and put our time and energies into the work of God.

Profession

This is the action phase of a living faith. In Noah's case this was building the ark – a huge task. However, in the embracing phase he had evaluated the work involved and made the moral commitment to do it. Hence the ark became the visible evidence of Noah's commitment to obey God's command despite all the visible evidence that building a big boat on dry land was pointless.

THINKING AHEAD (v8-21)

- What lesson do we learn from Abraham's decision to leave his home forever, not knowing where he was going to?
- How long did Abraham live in a tent?
- In what ways are we actually strangers and pilgrims today?
- Why is Sarah noted for faith in bearing a seed when she mocked the angel's promise in Gen 18:12-13?
- How did Sarah get the strength she needed? What triggered the change?
- How do we confess that we are strangers and pilgrims? Is it easy to do?
- What does v19 tell you about Abraham's mindset?
- How could Paul prove from the Genesis record that Abraham believed that God would raise Isaac v19?
- Didn't Isaac's blessing of Jacob & Esau demonstrate a lack of faith, given he and Rebekah were divided and he wanted to bless Esau (Gen 27:6-7)? Why is it cited here?
- What was so faithful about Jacob blessing Joseph's sons?
- Why mention Jacob's staff?
- Joseph endured rejection by his brothers, slavery in a foreign land, imprisonment for no fault of his own... isn't the "commandment concerning his bones" a really strange example to choose?
- Where were Joseph's bones buried? Is that where their story ended?



FAITH OF
THE PATRIARCHS

CHAPTER 11:8-21

ABRAHAM

The apostle Paul moves on to consider faith in the life of Abraham. There are many outstanding examples of faith in the record of the life of Abraham and Sarah as shown in the table below. It is interesting that Paul does not refer to the most frequently quoted example of Genesis 15:5-6. As discussed in the background section, Paul is looking only at examples relevant to the circumstances of the Hebrews.

Genesis	Incident
12:1-4	Leaves Ur
12:8	Decides to stay in Promised Land despite Canaanites
13:8-12	Let Lot chose the best of the land
14:14	Rescues Lot from invading armies
15:5-6	Believed his seed would be as many as the stars when as yet he had no children. Quoted in Rom 4:3, Gal 3:6 as an act of faith
17:23	Circumcised his whole house in one day (trusting that God would preserve them)
22	Offered Isaac

Not every example of faith in Abraham's life was appropriate for the Hebrews. If Paul were to cite the incredible display of faith when Abraham pursued a confederation of armies with only his 318 trained servants, the Hebrews might have been inspired to fight against the Roman forces, rather than flee their city and homeland. Not every principle or lesson applies to every circumstance. The Hebrews needed to remember the clear warnings of the Lord (Mt 24:15-16), and in line with that, cite Biblical examples that could help them in making the necessary stand.

8 *By faith Abraham, when he was called to go out into a place which he should after receive for an inheritance, obeyed; and he went out, not knowing whither he went.*

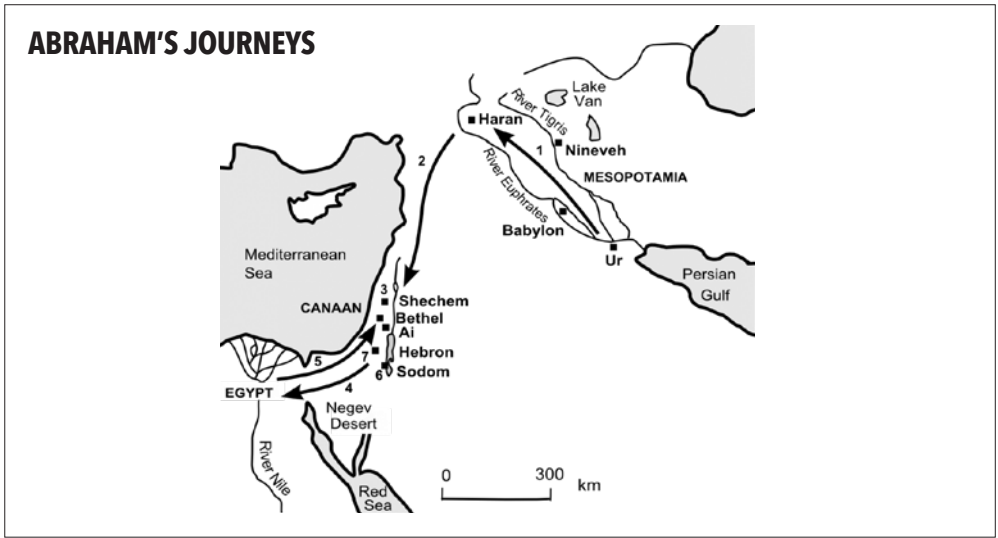
The fact that Abraham left Ur of the Chaldees not knowing where he was going to (Gen 12:1) but relying on God in faith was a perfect example to put before the Hebrew brethren to encourage them to leave Jerusalem despite the uncertainties. Paul uses key words and phrases to push home the parallel:

- Called to go out – Christ had commanded them to go out.
- Obeyed – would they obey Christ's command?
- Went out not knowing whither he went – exactly what the Hebrews had to do.

“Called to go out”

Abraham had the great privilege of being called by Yahweh. We are also called by God (1Pet 2:9-10) which is beyond what we deserve. Are we grateful that of all the people in the world God has called us?

Abraham left all – “country, kindred and father’s house” (Gen 12:1). The Hebrews also had to leave country and kindred and family too. We are called out to be separate from the world (2Cor 6:17, Eph 4:1, 1Thes 2:12; 1Pet 1:15).



“a place which he should after receive for an inheritance”

Abraham’s faith was on that which was still future. Acts 7:5 “he gave him none inheritance, not so much to put his foot on”.

“not knowing whither he went”

Gen 12:1 “unto a land that I will shew thee”. Abraham didn’t even know to what land God would lead him! But he believed that if God promised something then it was worth it.

In our lives, we face a similar dilemma. For many young people, brothers and sisters, their lives may not be working out as they had hoped. Young people may have dreams of living in a particular place, meeting the right partner and having a happy marriage. Brothers and sisters may envisage happy, healthy families in a peaceful and vibrant ecclesia.

But as life rolls on, things may not have worked out the way we had anticipated. Abraham’s example shows us that if we put our lives in God’s hands, praying to Him and trusting His guidance, then the twists and turns of life with all its unexpected changes in direction, will eventually be things that turn out for our good.

9 *By faith he sojourned in the land of promise, as in a strange country, dwelling in tabernacles with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise:*

Sojourned "*paroikeo*" (3939) – to dwell in a place as a stranger

Strange country "*allogrios*" (245) – foreign, strange, belonging to another

Tabernacles "*skene*" (4633) – tent, tabernacle

"Sojourned in the land of promise"

When Abraham entered the Land of Promise in Genesis 12:7, he discovered that the Land was already fully occupied by the Canaanites. Yet God had promised it to him! So what was he to do? He decided to wait – to sojourn. His faith was not based on what he could get in this life; but rather that he believed in God who has promised it to him one day.

"dwelling in tabernacles with Isaac and Jacob"

This statement is chronologically correct, as shown in the diagram on the next page. Abraham, Isaac and Jacob were contemporary for about 15 years. However, the point Paul is making is not so much the timing, but that after three generations they were still sojourning in the land in tents. Both the son and grandson embraced the spirit, fervour and faith of their forefather. It would have been so much easier for them to build houses and have a more settled existence, but they were determined to be strangers and pilgrims waiting for God to fulfil the promise. They did not choose the easy life of assimilation.

The logistics of living in tents would be no minor matter. The camp was large – when Abraham went to save Lot, he took 318 trained servants with him (Gen 14:14). Presumably these men were married, so there would be wives and children. This would make Abraham's camp at least 1000 people in number – nearly the size of Glenlock Camp, but on a permanent basis. The issues of this would be significant. How is water to be supplied for so many? What about sanitation? Food supply?

How hard it must have been for each generation to keep up the pilgrim lifestyle. Lot did not keep it up and ended up living in a house in Sodom (Gen 19:2). He didn't just choose to live the city life though; it was a process of gradual compromise (Gen 13:10-12). Little by little he gave up the pilgrim approach to life. The cost was his family (Gen 19:14,26). Later, Isaac would see his half-brother Ishmael build "*towns and castles*" (Gen 25:16). Jacob would watch as Esau's family built cities (Gen 36:32,35,39). But Isaac and Jacob continued to live in tents. This required the determination of faith.

Christadelphians face the similar issues to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. We are instructed to be strangers and pilgrims awaiting the kingdom of God (1Pet 2:11; Php 3:20). We might not have to live in tents, but even in more settled dwellings we should be like David and see ourselves as strangers and sojourners (1Chr 29:15). How are we going in this? Are we becoming like citizens of this world with a focus on life now, or are we eagerly awaiting the return of Christ and have our lives focussed on that?

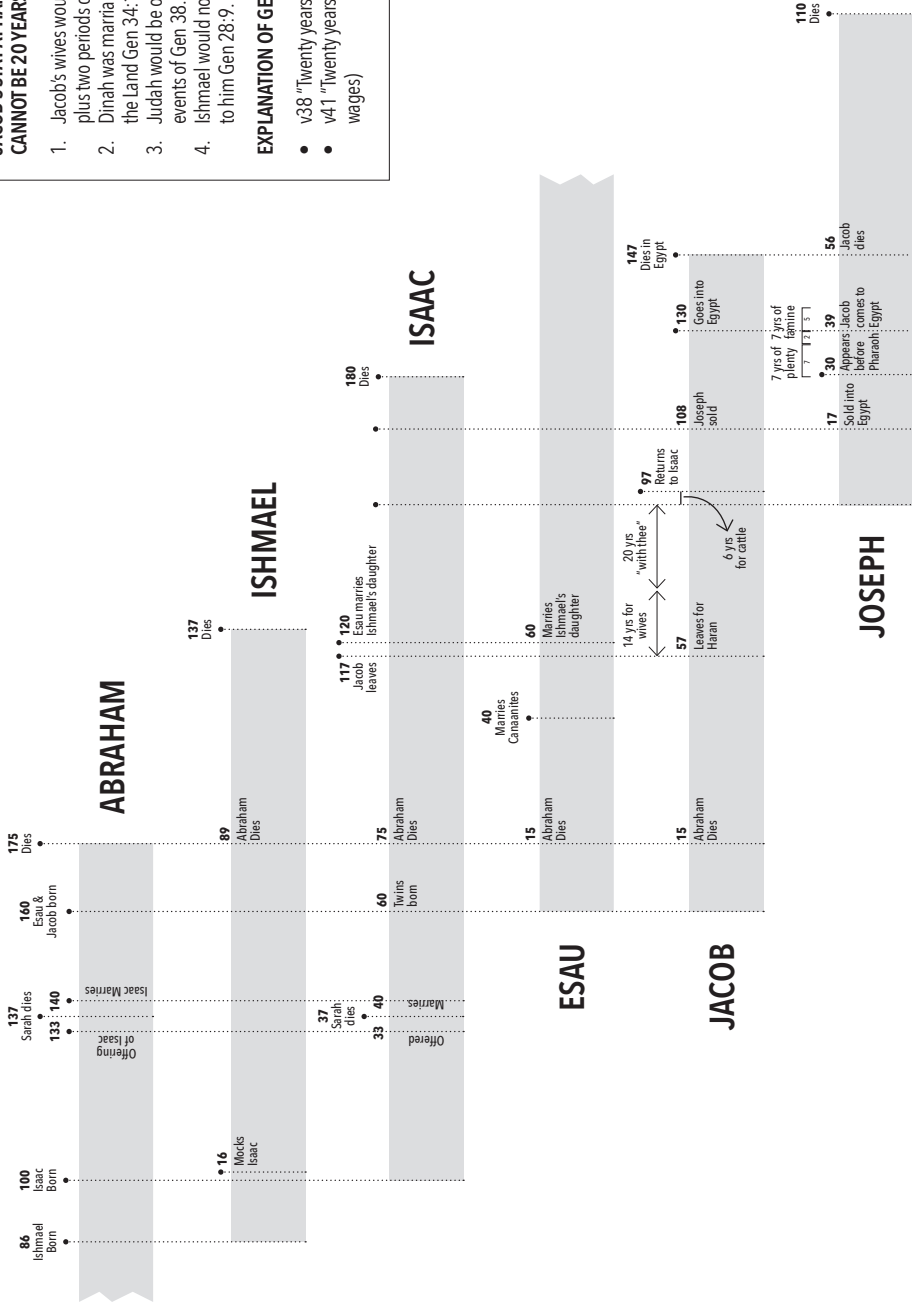
THE AGES OF THE PATRIARCHS

JACOB'S STAY AT HARAN CANNOT BE 20 YEARS:

1. Jacob's wives would have had 12 children plus two periods of barrenness in 7 years.
2. Dinah was marriageable age upon return to the Land Gen 34:1.
3. Judah would be only 36-42 at the time of events of Gen 38.
4. Ishmael would not be alive when Esau went to him Gen 28:9.

EXPLANATION OF GEN 31:38-41:

- v38 "Twenty years...with thee" (as a friend)
- v41 "Twenty years...I served thee" (for wages)



10 *For he looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God.*

Looked for	"ekdechomai" (1551) – wait for
Foundations	"themelios" (2310) – Vine "properly an adjective denoting 'belonging to a foundation'".
Builder	"technites" (5079) – architect or designer
Maker	"demiourgos" (1217) = <i>demos</i> (people) + <i>ergon</i> (work). Hence literally " <i>worker for the people</i> ". Having designed the City, God is working for the people to build it (1 Peter 2:6-7)

"He looked for a city"

Better rendered "*he waited for **the** City*" (compare YLT & ESV). Abraham was not satisfied with tent dwelling, he wanted to be in a city, but not any city – it had to be *The City*; God's City. Because of this God has prepared for him The City (v16). The City he was looking for is Zion to come, the city of the Living God (12:22). The Hebrews clung to the temporal city of Jerusalem, but they should have been focussed on the City to come. Paul later pleads with them, "*we have here no continuing city*" – instead we need to "*seek one to come*" (13:14). How focussed are we on Zion? Are we content to just live in this world, or do our hearts yearn to dwell in Zion, the city on the hill of Yahweh (Psa 24:3-4, Rev 14:1).

"which hath foundations"

Better rendered "*belonging to foundations*". Every city has foundations, so superficially this statement appears trite. However it is suggested that Paul is alluding to the LXX of Isaiah 28:16: "*Therefore thus saith the Lord, even the Lord, Behold, I lay for the foundations of Sion a costly stone, a choice, a corner-stone, a precious stone, for its foundations; and he that believes on him shall by no means be ashamed.*" This verse has many dimensions to it:

- God will build the future Zion on special foundations.
- The cornerstone of those foundations is a choice stone – it is Christ: "*Jesus saith unto them, Did ye never read in the scriptures, The stone which the builders rejected, the same is become the head of the corner.*" (Mt 21:42).
- Whoever believes on this cornerstone will not be ashamed (therefore will be saved).
- Paul quotes the same verse in Romans 9:33 to show that Israel had missed the foundation of Zion, being Christ, because they sought righteousness by law not by faith. This would be a key message for the Hebrew brethren considering going back to the Law.
- The context of Isa 28 is that of the destruction of Samaria. The City of Samaria is referred to as the "*crown of pride*" (28:1) but it was destroyed because the people had turned away from God. Jerusalem was the crown of pride to the Jews at the time Paul is writing Hebrews and they were to realise that God would destroy this city too.

Thus, this citation from Isaiah 28 informed the brethren that the true foundation of the City they were awaiting is ultimately the Lord Jesus, not the Law. To add to this, the description of the New Jerusalem in Revelation 21 (which represents the saints in glory), describes the 12 foundations, which we are told specifically relate to the apostles. Thus the "Heavenly Jerusalem" (12:22) is "*built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone*" (Eph 2:20).

“whose builder and maker is God”

Better, “whose architect and worker for the people is God”. This city is designed by God and God is working for people to build this city of people. By God’s grace, we are some of the people for whom God is building this city. What a great privilege we have.

SARAH

11 *Through faith also Sara herself received strength to conceive seed, and was delivered of a child when she was past age, because she judged him faithful who had promised.*

Rotherham: “By faith, even Sarah herself, received power for founding a seed, even beyond the season of life’s prime, -- seeing that, faithful, she reckoned, him that had promised.”

Strength “*dunamis*” (1411) – power residing inside a thing or person

Conceive “*katabole*” (2602) – a foundation, throwing or laying down, laying a foundation.
11 Occurrences in NT. Trans 10 times foundation. Eg; foundation of the world

Judged “*hegeomai*” (2233) – count, reckon

“Sara herself received strength”

“*Even Sarah herself*” (Roth) – why the emphasis? Sarah had struggled to have faith. When Abraham was told by the angel that Sarah would have a son, Sarah did not believe it. She “*laughed within herself, saying, After I am waxed old shall I have pleasure, my lord being old also?*” (Gen 18:12-14). Why might she struggle to believe this? She had been longing for years to have a son. Perhaps she was scared to believe, as she could not bear the disappointment if it proved not to be true.

What changed for Sarah for her to have faith? In Genesis 20 Abraham went to dwell in Gerar and said Sarah was his sister. Abraham at this point had a lapse in faith. What’s more, he had made this mistake before when in Egypt (Gen 12:10-20). Abimelech the king then took Sarah (20:2). Imagine the shock to Sarah. Her security in Abraham is all gone. She now has to trust in Yahweh. Over time, she – together with the rest of the palace – noticed that “*Yahweh had fast closed up all the wombs of the house of Abimelech*” (v18). Then, when Abraham prayed to God, God opened their wombs. It would appear that it was because of this miracle that Sarah realised that if God can do this to other women, then He can open Sarah’s womb too. When *both* Abraham and Sarah had faith, Isaac, the child of faith, could be born.

What was the point for the Hebrews? The Hebrew sisters would perhaps be struggling more than the brethren with the thought of leaving Jerusalem; leaving behind their homes and families. Paul was reassuring them. If they are struggling with Faith, God can fix that.

Another interesting lesson arises from Sarah’s story: someone else’s faith cannot save you. Abraham believed God when He promised him a son (Gen 15:5-6). But Sarah did not. God did not just say, “His belief is good enough” – He wanted a personal response from *both* Abraham

and Sarah. Faith is an individual matter – everyone needs faith. But Abraham could help Sarah develop it through his own example of faith, by encouraging and nurturing his wife, and most importantly through prayer.

“to conceive seed”

Better “*founding a seed*” . Paul is linking the birth of Isaac with the laying of the foundation for the City of v10. Sarah founded the seed which was the beginnings of the City of God.

“when she was past age”

Romans 4:17-21 records that Abraham believed that despite the fact that he and Sarah were too old to have a child, God could still do it. Here Sarah is commended on the same account. It is a reminder for the Hebrew brothers and sisters, and for us, that despite the problems that may confront us, perhaps with no apparent solution, through faith the impossible can happen. In Sarah’s life, faith conquered the unconquerable.

12 *Therefore sprang there even of one, and him as good as dead, so many as the stars of the sky in multitude, and as the sand which is by the sea shore innumerable.*

Sprang “*gennao*” (1080) – to be born, begotten

Sky “*ouranos*” (3772) - heaven

Shore “*cheilos*” (5491) – lip

“As many as the stars of the sky in multitude”

Quoting Genesis 22:17 which refers back to Genesis 15:5. From just one descendant came the whole of the Jewish nation.

“The phrases used here are often employed to denote a vast multitude, as nothing appears more numerous than the stars of heaven, or than the sands that lie on the shores of the ocean. The strength of faith in this case was, that there was simple confidence in God in the fulfilment of a promise where all human probabilities were against it. This is, therefore, an illustration of the nature of faith. It does not depend on human reasoning, on analogy, on philosophical probabilities, on the foreseen operation of natural laws; but on the mere assurance of God—no matter what may be the difficulties to human view, or the improbabilities against it.” (Albert Barnes, Commentary on Hebrews 11:12).

STRANGERS & PILGRIMS

13 *These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them, and embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth.*

Persuaded	<i>"peitho"</i> (3982) – to induce one by words to believe
Embraced	<i>"aspazomai"</i> (782) – to draw to oneself
Confessed	<i>"homologeō"</i> (3670) – to say to another, profess
Stranger	<i>"xenos"</i> (3581) – a foreigner, alien,
Pilgrim	<i>"parepidemos"</i> (3927) – Vine: 'sojourning in a strange place'

"These all died in faith not having received the promises"

These faithful had waited and waited for God's promises to be fulfilled throughout their lives. But unlike the Hebrews, they had not tired of waiting. We can slide into apathy if we think that Christ's return may be years away. Then there becomes no urgency about the Truth and not the same need to sacrifice our lives for God. The flesh thinks, *'Well then, we can take it easy.'*

"persuaded... embraced... confessed"

These are three stages of identification with the promises:

- Persuaded – the intellectual response (*I believe this intellectually*)
- Embraced (to draw to oneself) – the emotional response leading to a moral change – a warm embracing of the promises of salvation. This shows in the way we live, the way we spend our time, the things we talk about, the way we dress, the objectives we have. If we love the things of God, it will be our whole lives, there will be no appetite for worldly things in all that we say or do.
- Confessed – the public proclamation to others that the promises are believed. If the promises of God are our lives we will talk about them to others.

"strangers and pilgrims"

All the faithful saw themselves as strangers and pilgrims. For example:

- Abraham: *"I am a stranger and a sojourner with you."* Gen 23:4
- Jacob: *"The days of the years of my pilgrimage the life of my fathers in the days of their pilgrimage."* Gen 47:9
- Israel: *"The land shall not be sold for ever: for the land is mine; for ye are strangers and sojourners with me."* Lev 25:23
- David: *"For we are strangers before thee, and sojourners, as were all our fathers."* 1Chr 29:15
- The Rechabites: *"that ye may live many days in the land where ye be strangers."* Jer 35:7
- *"I am a stranger in the earth."* Psa 119:19
- The First Century Ecclesia: *"Dearly beloved, I beseech you as strangers and pilgrims."* 1Pet 2:11

A stranger is one who is an alien in a foreign country; one whose ways and customs are different to those of the country they are in. **In essence they don't fit in.**

Pilgrims are those that are on a **journey to another place**. They are eager to move on because of the pressure of limited time; they have no ties to places they pass through. Many Egyptians make pilgrimages to Mecca. The pictures of their modes of transport are sometimes shown on the sides of their houses.

Pilgrims are different to citizens in approach to life. The table below sets out some of these contrasts. Are we citizens of this world or are we pilgrims on the way to the Kingdom?

Citizens	Pilgrim
Settled life	Ready to leave
Strong attachments to place of abode	No attachment – eye instead on destination
Present comforts important	Will put up with discomforts as one passes through a place
Life is full of interests – hobbies, holidays, possessions	Sole interest – reaching their destination
Not so concerned if there is some waste of time	Try not to waste time

“What is it to come from a far country? Those who have experienced such a condition know that the conditions are different to those of stay-at-home life... At home we are disposed to think we have almost unlimited time at our disposal, the ending of our days seems so far off that it does not matter when a little time is “lost,” when there is such a good stock of the article to draw upon. But when we are (traveling as a pilgrim) all this is changed. Then we think there is no time to lose.”

“C.H.” The Christadelphian 1895, page 253

“Let your loins be girded about, and your lights burning; and ye yourselves like unto men that wait for their Lord... Be ye therefore ready also: for the Son of man cometh at an hour when ye think not.” (Luke 12:35-40)

14-15 **For they that say such things declare plainly that they seek a country. And truly, if they had been mindful of that country from whence they came out, they might have had opportunity to have returned.**

Rotherham v14 “For, they who such things as these are saying make it clear that, of a paternal home they are in quest;”

- Country** *“patris”* (3968) – one’s fatherland, one’s own country
- Been mindful** *“mnemoneuo”* (3421) – remember, call to mind (implied with special interest or affection)
- Came out** *“exerchomai”* (1831) – to depart, metaphorically to “forsake”
- Opportunity** *“kairos”* (2540) – literally time. In this case in Gk imperfect tense – hence “they would have again and again had opportunity (time) to return”

“declare plainly they seek a country”

Those that are pilgrims and strangers are making it plain that they seek a country which is their destination. That country is termed the ‘fatherland’ (Gk *patris*) in v14, meaning the country that really is their home. The faithful like us seek the Kingdom of God, and no earthly place is home until then.

“have had opportunity to have returned”

Abraham and his family had the opportunity time and again to go back to Ur of the Chaldees, if they had maintained a special affection for that place, but they did not do so. The implication for the Hebrew brothers and sisters was that their special affection ought not to be for Jerusalem, but for the Kingdom of God. Does it really matter then if they had to leave Jerusalem?

What about us? Is our special affection on the places and associations of this world? Do we care more about our status in the eyes of others or our standing before God?

Do we want to belong here, or are we longing for Zion?

16 But now they desire a better country, that is, an heavenly: wherefore God is not ashamed to be called their God: for he hath prepared for them a city.

Desire “*oregomai*” (3713) – to stretch oneself out to touch or to grasp something, to yearn for

Called “*epikaleomai*” (1941) – to put a name upon, to surname

“They desire a better country... an heavenly”

“*They yearn for*” a better country – a country whose origins are from heaven. This shows where their affection was. “*Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth.*” (Col 3:2).

“God is not ashamed to be called their God”

God is willing to be associated with these men because of their commitment to Him. He is even pleased to add their names to His own – to be surnamed as Yahweh “*the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob*” (Ex 3:15). What an enormous privilege for an individual to have their name attached to God’s! Such is the honour bestowed on them because of their determination to be strangers and pilgrims in the earth, yearning for God’s kingdom.

We have an extraordinary privilege too. We are invited to be in God’s family: “*Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons (children) of God*” (1John 3:1). We even have the prospect of being surnamed with God’s name of Yahweh in the kingdom; “*I will write upon him the name of my God*” (Rev 3:12).

It is notable that the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob is often used, but why does God only use those three names? Other men and women were also faithful as seen in Hebrews 11. There is more to this ascription of God than simply honouring three faithful men. Collectively, these three represent the full purpose of God to reveal himself through a Son and so to produce a multitude like himself.

Patriarch	Description	Represents
Abraham	The father of the faithful	God
Isaac	The seed of the promise	Christ
Jacob	Became a multitude	Spiritual Israel

“Hath prepared for them a city”

This is in the Greek aorist tense (similar to English past tense): *“hath already prepared”*. God has already prepared the City. It is not that he may make a city for them; although it is yet to be constructed, the making of this city is certain. Cp Matt 25:34 *“the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.”*

SACRIFICE OF ISAAC

17 *By faith Abraham, when he was tried, offered up Isaac: and he that had received the promises offered up his only begotten son.*

Received *“anadechomai”* (324) – receive gladly – used of receiving someone at the door whom you would honour to come into your house.

Only begotten son *“monogenes”* (3439) – single of its kind. Note: Son is in italics, it is not in the text.

“When he was tried offered up Isaac”

Church commentators see Abraham’s actions as blind obedience to the commandment. This was not the case. It was an act of faith. We know that to be the case because after the whole episode, Abraham named the place *“Yahweh-Yireh”*, meaning *“Yahweh will provide”* (Gen 22:14 KJV mg). Abraham saw what the offering of Isaac prefigured: *“Abraham rejoiced to see my day”* (John 8:56).

Despite his faith, offering his dear son was undoubtedly a heart wrenching experience for Abraham, as is evident in the parallel statements of this verse. The first statement records the actions, the second statement gives the feelings, the thoughts, what it meant (faith struggling with emotions).

The action	The feelings
Abraham	He that had received the promises
Offered up	Offered up
Isaac	His only begotten son

Abraham understood why this sacrifice was necessary. The sequence of experiences that God gave to Abraham in his life was no accident. God was teaching Abraham the Gospel (Gal 3:8), and the sacrifice of Isaac was the final piece in this process.

Things concerning the kingdom...	And the name of Jesus Christ
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Gen 11 – Leaving Ur – Dissociating from the kingdom of men. - Gen 12-13 – Promised the Land, a great seed and a name. - Gen 14 – Type of Armageddon <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Invasion of northern confederacy - Miraculous victory of God’s people - Gen 17 – Father of many nations, “kings shall come out of thee” - Gen 22 – Son promised who would rule enemies 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Gen 17 – Circumcision - Cutting off flesh - Gen 18 – Birth of Isaac promised - Gen 21 – Birth of Isaac, promised seed - Gen 22 – Typical death & resurrection of Isaac, the promised seed. - Gen 22 – Forgiveness preached - All nations blessed in Abraham’s seed (Acts 3:25-26).

“offered up his only begotten son”

Better: “was offering up his special one”. The word ‘son’ is not in the Greek text and the term “only begotten” means “a unique one; one of a kind.” A similar situation is to be found in Genesis 22:2: “Take now thy son, thine only son Isaac”. Isaac was not Abraham’s only son; he also had Ishmael. However the translation is not quite correct. The word for “thine only” is Heb. ‘yachiyd’ and means ‘the one with whom you are perfectly united’. Isaac was the one with whom Abraham was perfectly united, a wonderful picture of the closeness of the Father and the Son.

18-19 *Of whom it was said, That in Isaac shall thy seed be called: Accounting that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead; from whence also he received him in a figure.*

Figure “parabole” (3850) - parable

Able “dunatos” (1415) – adjective equivalent to dunamis – power.

“In Isaac shall thy seed be called”

Quotation from Gen 21:12

“he received him in a figure”

Abraham understood this to be a parable of redemption through God’s son (John 8:56). The type is very strong in the story of the sacrifice of Isaac as is seen in the tables below.

Abraham (Gen 22)	Yahweh
“Take now thy son, thine only one” v2	“The only begotten of Father” (Jn 1:14)
“Whom thou lovest” v2	“This is my beloved son” (Mt 3:17)
“Rose up early” v3 - Abraham was willing	“It pleased Yahweh to bruise him” (Isa 53:10)
Took knife & fire - controlled the sacrifice v6	Appointed the death of Christ on the cross (Php 2:8)
Went both of them together v6	Father & Son united (Jn 10:30)
Did not withhold his only one v12	Did not withhold His Son (Rom 5:8)

Isaac (Gen 22)	Christ
Offered on a hill in Moriah v2	Christ died on Golgotha (cp. 2Chr 3:1)
As good as dead three days & nights in the mind of Abraham v4	Three days & nights in the grave (Mt 12:40).
Carried the wood for the offering v6	Carried his own cross (Jn 19:17)
Enquired about the lamb v7	The Lamb of God (Jn 1:36)
Delivered, but replaced by ram entangled by horns v13	The head of the flock offered because of his entanglement (Mt 26:31)
Taken up from the altar - in a figure resurrected (Heb 11:19)	Raised from the grave on the third day (Acts 2:24)

What was the relevance for the Hebrews?

This small phrase, "*in a figure*", bears incredible weight for the Hebrews. Paul is recording history that relates to the forefathers of the Jewish race. His little phrase, "*in a figure*" is a probe for the Hebrews to look deeper. What figure? What parable?

Paul has marvellously woven into the very fabric of the Jewish existence a proof for why the Hebrews should look to Christ, not the Law. Genesis 22 held so much more for the perceptive eye, as the tables above demonstrate.

But the reference tells us more than that. Genesis 22 is focussed on the sacrifice of Isaac from Abraham's perspective. The parable, therefore, must be informing us of what the crucifixion was like for God, the Father. We are called to stand and watch as the Father takes His very own Son, the one with whom He is so closely united, and offers him upon Moriah. And all this was to happen through no fault of either the Father or the Son.

The lesson for the Hebrews was powerful.

- Abraham believed that God can bring life from death (v19). He could do this for the Hebrews too, were they to die at the hands of their brethren.
- Abraham believed that God would fulfil His promises (v17). He would still do this, despite the fall of Jerusalem.
- But most importantly, the Hebrews needed to remember the agony that our God has been through to achieve His purpose in Christ. Consider what the Father has given so that we can be saved! Don't turn back to the Law. Don't turn away to the world. Obey God in faith; He will reward accordingly.

THE DEATH-BED BLESSINGS

At first it seems strange that there are three death-bed blessings in the middle of Hebrews 11 in the context of faith. Part of the reason for this is that to the Jews death and burial were very important events. Having a respectable burial was and still is important to Jews. In Western countries Jews tend to have impressive monumental graves to honour their dead.

In many places adjacent to the old city of Jerusalem there are vast numbers of graves because so many Jews have wanted to be buried beside their beloved Jerusalem.

For the Hebrews, confronting the thought of leaving their beloved city, they would struggle with the prospect that being strangers and pilgrims in the Gentile world will likely mean that they will not be able to be buried at Jerusalem.

ISAAC

20 *By faith Isaac blessed Jacob and Esau concerning things to come.*

The story of the blessing of Jacob and Esau is Genesis 27:1-28:4. The tension between Isaac and Rebekah is evident in that Esau is termed “his son” (27:5) and Jacob is “her son” (27:6). Why Isaac was bewitched with Esau is not stated. It was not due to any goodness of character, for Paul describes Esau as a fornicator and a profane person (Heb 12:16). Perhaps Esau had an engaging personality; the sort of person that can tell entertaining stories and be the life of the party.

The drama of the story begins when Isaac who is blind and thinks he is at death’s door tells Esau to kill and cook some venison for him and then he will bless him. Rebekah either thought Isaac was planning to give the Abrahamic Promises to Esau, or the blessing of the firstborn, both of which she thought were rightfully Jacob’s (25:28,33). So she gets Jacob to pretend to be Esau. When Isaac does bless the son he thinks is Esau (but is actually Jacob) he does not give him the Promises, rather he gives him a subset of the blessings of the firstborn. This is demonstrated in the table on the below. Isaac holds back from giving him the blessing of the priesthood, as this would be more appropriate for Jacob, who was the more spiritual son. The blessing of Jacob “concerning things to come” is given later in Genesis 28:3-4, and is described in the Genesis account as “the blessing of Abraham” (v4).

	Blessing of Firstborn		Blessing Isaac gave (Gen 27)
1	Double portion (prosperity)	Deut 21:15-17	v28 “give thee fatness of the earth, plenty of corn and wine”
2	Rulership	2Chr 21:3	v29 “people serve thee ... Lord over thy brethren”
3	Priesthood	Num 8:5-19	-

BLESSING BY FAITH?

How can it be said that Isaac blessed by faith when he was tricked by Jacob? Firstly, Isaac never intended to give the Abrahamic blessing to Esau. But further to this, when Isaac realised he had been tricked, we are told that he “trembled exceedingly” (Gen 27:33 mg). Why? Would we not expect anger rather than fear? It appears that the fright of having blessed the wrong son brings him to his senses. He saw God’s hand in this. He realised he was wrong to try to give the blessing of firstborn to Esau, who had sold his birthright. Following this, therefore, he blesses by faith:

- 27:33 – Isaac said, “*and he (Jacob) shall be blessed.*”
- 27:39 – Isaac continues to Esau: “*thy dwelling shall be away from the fatness of the earth*” (Roth & ESV). Esau got Edom, no fatness and no dew.
- 28:3-4 – Isaac gave Jacob the Promises to Abraham (which God confirms in 28:13-14).

So why is this incident in Hebrews 11? Firstly, because when God is superintending events, there is no mistake about who will end up with an eternal blessing. Though the wicked like Esau might appear to prosper for a time, God would bless those who responded to His call. But secondly, God can sometimes give someone a shock to re-adjust their thinking to right ways. The Hebrews were favouring Judaism when they knew it was wrong, just like Isaac favoured Esau when he knew it was wrong. Paul is telling them they need a shock to see things really as they really are.

For us, shocks do come in life. We should therefore be prepared to ask ourselves whether in such shocks the Father is shaking us out of false attachments. Perhaps we are being drawn into the world, or our judgment is being skewed by ungodly friends?

JACOB

21 *By faith Jacob, when he was a dying, blessed both the sons of Joseph; and worshipped, leaning upon the top of his staff.*

Staff “*rhabdos*” – staff, rod.

There are two incidents referred to here, and they are in reverse chronological order.

1. Genesis 48:1-20 - Blessing of Joseph’s sons; and
2. Genesis 47:29-31 - Jacob’s request to be buried with Abraham & Isaac

It seems the order is reversed so that the two death-bed blessings are placed together (Isaac & Jacob) and the two burial requests together (Jacob & Joseph).

“blessed both the sons of Joseph”

Better “*each of the sons of Joseph,*” as in YLT & ESV. Jacob put Ephraim and Manasseh in the place of his firstborn sons, Reuben & Simeon (Gen 48:5, 1Chr 5:1). Then he proceeded to bless Ephraim ahead of Manasseh (who was the firstborn). This was a shock to Joseph. Joseph tried to move Jacob’s hands to bless Manasseh ahead of Ephraim, but Jacob refused. This would not have been easy for Jacob. He would not want to go against the wishes of his beloved son. Evidently there was a reason.



Why did Jacob swap his hands when blessing the two sons of Joseph?

“worshipped leaning on the top of his staff”

This is referring back to the historical record in Genesis 47:31, however in that passage it actually says, “*Israel bowed himself upon the beds head.*” How can this difference be reconciled?

The Hebrew word for ‘bed head’ is *mittah* (H4294), and the Hebrew word for ‘staff’ is *matteh* (H4296). They have the same letters (מטת) and only differ in the vowel points added by the Masoretes (Jewish Scholars) to the Hebrew text in about 700AD. Barnes, in his commentary, says “*The Masoretic points are of no authority*”. The LXX of Genesis 47:31, translated from the Hebrew in approx. 200BC, reads “*Israel did reverence leaning on the top of his staff*”. As the LXX and the Greek NT text agree, it would appear “staff” is the correct reading, and that in this case the Masoretes made an error with the vowel pointings.

Why would Paul quote this incident to the Hebrews?

The answer lies in the life-long story of Jacob’s development that is memorialised in his staff. Jacob knew that at times he was a deceitful man, and that he had learned this from his mother (Gen 27:12-13). He struggled with trusting in his own strength and cunning to overcome life’s challenges:

- It was this problem that led to the whole story of trickery in Genesis 27.
- In leaving Laban, Jacob “*fled away secretly*” from Laban because he was afraid that Laban would take his daughters by force (Gen 31:26-31).
- In meeting Esau, Jacob carefully divided his party into two groups, then sent three droves of servants with presents ahead of himself to meet Esau (Gen 32).

Each of those incidents shows that Jacob struggled to rely upon God to provide a solution to the problems of life. We can find this a major issue too, especially in a world with so much automation and materialism.

Jacob had been driven by fear of man in each of these situations. In fact, when he had left for Laban back in Genesis 28, Jacob had made a vow – in some senses, a bargain – with God. He said, “*If God will be with me, and will keep me in this way that I go, and will give me bread to eat, and raiment to put on, so that I come again to my father’s house in peace; then shall Yahweh be my God.*” (Gen 28:20-21).

But then one day God changed everything for Jacob. When he was facing Esau in Genesis 32, an angel met Jacob who wrestled with him all night in search of a blessing. Eventually the angel touched Jacob’s thigh, making the sinew shrink and putting it out of joint, so that from that point onwards, Jacob had to use a staff to walk (Gen 32:25,31-32). He could not defend himself anymore, he was crippled. He had no option but to rely on Yahweh.


Here at the end of his life, in this incident recorded in Hebrews 11, we find Jacob in Egypt. He has left the Promised Land by God’s instruction. Despite having to leave, however, Jacob has maintained his faith and reverence for Yahweh. At the very end of life he is still leaning on his staff; Yahweh has cared for him and kept him safe all his life long, and he trusted him until the day he died. The Hebrews were to realise that they too should depend on Yahweh to care for them no matter where they sojourned.

What do we lean on in our lives? Is our security in the things we possess or is all our trust in Yahweh?

In this incident Jacob also asked Joseph to return his body to the Land and bury him with Abraham and Isaac in the cave of Machpelah (Gen 47:30). This showed that he had not lost his desire for the land, but that he was prepared to sojourn in Egypt until he died because that was Yahweh's direction. Again, the point to the Hebrews was that although their hearts might forever be in the land and in Jerusalem, they need to be prepared to be strangers and pilgrims like Jacob was.

THINKING AHEAD (v22-31)

- Was it right for Moses' parents to disobey the king's law?
- If v24 was very public investiture, how would Pharaoh have felt at Moses' rejection?
- What kind of reproach might we have to bear in life? v26
- How do you see Him who is invisible? v27
- Why are there only two acts of faith about the tribes of Israel in v29-30, and how far apart are they?
- Why is Rahab called "*the harlot*" and noted for her faith?
- Compare what James notes about Rahab's faith. Why is "*receiving the spies*" of note here?

A photograph of a vast field of golden wheat in the foreground, leading to a line of trees and a small white building on the horizon. The sun is low on the horizon, creating a bright glow and a lens flare effect. The sky is a clear, pale blue.

FAITH LEADING
TO THE
PROMISED LAND

CHAPTER 11:22-31

JOSEPH

In this chapter of faith, the only mention of Joseph is in relation to his death (refer Gen 50:24-26). If the sole purpose of the chapter were to recount moving examples of faith, there are other instances of faith in Joseph's life that could have been included:

- Maintained obedience by faith, despite evil brothers who hated him.
- Maintained integrity by faith in the house of Potiphar.
- Maintained his belief in God when in prison even though his situation had gone from bad to worse, irrespective of his faithfulness.
- Expounded the dreams of the butler and baker through faith.
- Before Pharaoh, he witnessed to God and expounded Pharaoh's dream.

But Paul did not choose to mention any of these great acts of faith by Joseph. Rather, he is showing that despite being in exile for most of his life, Joseph's belief that God would bring Israel back into the Land had not dimmed, and neither had his desire to be buried in the Land.

22 *By faith Joseph, when he died, made mention of the departing of the children of Israel; and gave commandment concerning his bones.*

Made mention *"mnemoneuo"* (3421) – "remember, call to mind (implied with special interest or affection)". s/w trans. "mindful" v15.

Departing *"exodus"* (1841) – same word used of the exodus from Egypt

"Made mention of the departing of the children of Israel"

"Made mention" as noted above means "*mentioned with special affection*". Joseph, as a dying man, mentioned with special affection the exodus of Israel from Egypt. This shows that despite being in Egypt for almost all his life, his hopes and affections were with the purpose of God and the returning of Israel to the Land. Though the brethren would leave the Land – they must never forget Jerusalem (Psa 137:4-5, written in Babylon).

How did Joseph know that Israel would return? Because of the promises to Abraham "*Know of a surety that thy seed shall be a stranger in a land that is not theirs, and shall serve them; and they shall afflict them four hundred years; And also that nation, whom they shall serve, will I judge: and afterward shall they come out with great substance*" (Gen 15:13-14).

"gave commandment concerning his bones"

If the Hebrews thought their place of burial was important, this was left for dead by the Egyptians. They lived for the afterlife. Immense monuments marked the burial site of the Pharaoh's, and slaves, possessions and resources would be buried with him to help them in their life after death. As an important Egyptian, second to Pharaoh, Joseph had an immense array of options as to

where his bones could rest:

- He could have had a major tomb, like a pyramid, as a burial place in Egypt.
- He could have arranged to retire to the land of Canaan – then when he died he would be buried there.
- He could have taken the children of Israel back with him to the Land after the famine had finished and lived with them there.
- He could have arranged for his body to be taken back to the Land shortly after his death and be given a grand burial then, just like he had done for his father Jacob.

Instead of all this, Joseph commanded his brethren that when Israel left Egypt they should take his bones with them back to the Land (Gen 50:25). Joseph believed God would bring them home, and chose to await God's timeline.

Those reading Hebrews 11 would have to leave Israel with no certainty of return in this life – no prospect that when they died they could be buried there. Nonetheless, like Joseph, they had to learn to wait for Yahweh's purpose. There is the set time to favour Zion and until that time they had to wait. We have to wait for the Kingdom to come. We might like it to come now, and we might be weary of waiting, yet we must continue to wait for Yahweh's appointed time.

MOSES

We might naturally identify Moses with Law and not so much with Faith. This makes the use of his example all the more striking for the Hebrews. Paul illustrates that the motive force in Moses' life was faith by quoting the following examples:

- By faith his parents hid him at birth.
- By faith he refused the title of "Son of Pharaoh's Daughter" when he came of age.
- By faith he confronted Pharaoh and sought Israel's release, at great risk to his life.
- By faith he kept the Passover, painting the blood as instructed.

23 *By faith Moses, when he was born, was hid three months of his parents, because they saw he was a proper child; and they were not afraid of the king's commandment.*

Proper "asteios" (791) – "of polished manners, goodly, beautiful." Only other occ: Acts 7:20 "exceeding fair". Also used in Ex 2:2 LXX of Moses birth, Num 22:32, Jud 3:17.

Afraid "phobos" (5399) – "fear"

Commandment "diatagma" (1297) – Vine: "that which is imposed by decree or law"

The record of Moses birth is in Exodus 2:2-4 and is commented on in Acts 7:20.

"By faith Moses, when he was born"

This is really the faith of Moses' parents, Amram and Jochebed. The power of their example is appreciated when we compare their response to the Ecclesia around them. Most of Israel at the time were idolators – Joshua later spoke of "the gods which your fathers served on the other side of the flood, and in Egypt" (Josh 24:14).

“he was a proper child”

In Stephen’s speech (Acts 7:20) he says, “Moses was born and was exceeding fair” (mg “fair to God”). There was something striking about this baby, something special.

Perhaps Moses’ parents also thought about the 400 years of oppression which Abraham was told his children would endure in Genesis 15:13-16. Abraham was told that his seed would come out of the land of oppression in the fourth generation, and Moses’ parents would doubtless have been aware that Moses was the fourth generation since Israel had entered Egypt (Ex 6 – Levi v16, Kothath v16, Amram v18, Moses v20).

“they were not afraid of the king’s command”

The record in Exodus 2:2-4 reads as though when Moses was born he was a nice little boy, too good to cast into the Nile, and so they hid him. Then after 3 months he was perhaps making too much noise to be hidden any more. Then, being fearful that not only Moses might be found and killed, but that they also might be killed for disobeying the decree, they put him in the ark near where Pharaoh’s daughter bathed hoping she would take pity on him.

But in this verse in Hebrews 11, we discover that they were not afraid of the king’s decree to kill all little boys; they acted out of faith. They saw their little boy was exceptional – perhaps a man of destiny – and so they stepped out in faith in two ways:

- They did not comply with Pharaoh’s decree to kill him, even though many of their Hebrew brothers and sisters had resigned themselves to that fate; and
- They put him in the basket on the river to get him into the presence of the daughter of Pharaoh.

The result was that God wrought marvellously for them. Yet all sorts of things could have gone wrong. Someone less sympathetic may have found the basket, or it may have tipped over, leaving Moses to drown.

The placement of Miriam to watch what would happen to the baby was also done in faith. Miriam’s quick response when Pharaoh’s daughter looked on Moses indicates that her offer of providing a nurse was pre-planned and well rehearsed.

There were some lessons for the Hebrews in the actions of Moses’ parents:

- Moses’ parents were driven by their faith to disobey Pharaoh’s decree when all around them were complying with it. And God blessed them for it. The Hebrews had to act – regardless of what their brethren and the Zealots said – and leave Jerusalem.
- They were prepared to entrust their dear little boy into the hands of Gentiles, having faith that God would work in that circumstance. The Hebrews had to go in faith to live amongst the Gentiles, trusting that God would care for them and their families.

24 By faith Moses, when he was come to years, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh’s daughter;

By faith Moses refused to accept the title of “Son of Pharaoh’s daughter”. By doing so he turned down worldly honours, with all its attendant power and importance. We are not told exactly how old he was when made this decision. Josephus indicates that he was 12 when he made this choice. If this is true it is remarkable parallel with our Lord Jesus Christ who at 12 was determined to be about His Father’s business.

25 *Choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season;*

Choosing rather Aorist tense – “having chosen once and for all”

Season “*proskairos*” (4340) – enduring only for a while, temporary

“Choosing rather”

In his speech, Stephen said of Moses that he was “*learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians, and was mighty in words and deeds*” (Acts 7:22). Josephus says that Moses had a university training and then military training; that he had risen to the rank of General in the army and had led the army to an unexpected victory over the Ethiopians¹⁵. Consequently, he was highly regarded in Egypt. One can imagine the people bowing before him as he went walked down the street, giving him honour and respect.

Moses threw all of that away and knowingly chose to be with the people of God. They were down-trodden slaves – the dregs of society. Being Hebrews, the Egyptians would not even eat with them (Gen 43:32). He knew in making that choice that it would alienate him from all his former colleagues and would irreversibly align him with the despised Hebrew community. Once the choice was made there was no way back. The affliction he would suffer, however, was only momentary (2Cor 4:17).

What was harder about Moses’ decision, however, was that even though he gave up far more than his brethren – who were already in a terrible predicament – they still resented the stand he made and the persecution it brought. They wanted peace with the Egyptians so that there was no friction between them (Ex 5:20-21). And so they rejected Moses because of the stand he made (Acts 7:25,27,35)!

When the Hebrews made a stand for Christ, they were inevitably headed for conflict. Some in the Jewish community were bent on making peace with the Romans; others wanted to fight their way out of the situation. The believers would have to make a stand against both groups, come what may.

Just like Moses left the palace, the Hebrews would have to leave behind the grandeur of the temple, the family connections they had, the houses, lands, occupations etc. They would need to count the cost. In reality however, with the advantage of hindsight, all these things of value to them were going to be destroyed a few short years later, so there was really no loss at all.

“the pleasures of sin for a season”

Why would it be sin for Moses to choose to enjoy a wealthy life as an important man in the house of Pharaoh? This is not stating that Moses sinned by virtue of the fact that he grew up wealthy or because he was brought up amid royalty. But the pleasures offered by a life like that are worldly pleasures; and to devote our lives to that instead of to the service of God would be sin. But for Moses there was even more to it. He knew that God had called him to deliver His people (Acts 7:22). To neglect that calling would have been to choose the path of sin (James 4:17).

We are called to be Christ’s and separate from this world. Are we true to that calling? Do we indulge ourselves in the pleasures of the world despite knowing this?

¹⁵Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews*, Bk 2, Ch 9-11.

26 Esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt: for he had respect unto the recompence of the reward.

Esteeming "hegeomai" (2233) – "to count, to lead (in the mind)"

Reproach "oneidismos" (3680) – "abuse, insult"

Respect "apoblepo" (578) – "to turn the eyes away from other things and fix them on some one thing" (Thayer)

Recompence of the reward "misthapodosia" (3405) – "payment for hire"

YLT: "Greater wealth having reckoned the reproach of Christ than the treasures of Egypt"

"Esteeming"

Moses counted the cost and made his decision. He knew it was going to cost him dearly in this life, but he crucified the flesh with its lusts to gain the reward of the kingdom. Discipleship of Christ comes at a cost. We cannot live in the world and keep up with our school friends and work colleagues and serve God (Mt 6:24). As Moses found, serving God is worth it, but it does require sacrifice.

Have we truly counted the cost to follow Christ? There is the temptation to hold onto the pleasures of this world, but in reality when Christ comes those pleasures will be gone anyway.

"Whosoever doth not bear his cross and come after me cannot be my disciple. For which of you, intending to build a tower, sitteth not down first, and counteth the cost, whether he have sufficient to finish it? Lest haply, after he hath laid the foundation, and is not able to finish it, all that behold it begin to mock him, saying, This man began to build, and was not able to finish.... So likewise, **whosoever he be of you that forsaketh not all that he hath**, he cannot be my disciple." (Lk 14:27-33).

"the reproach of Christ"

Moses was abused by his colleagues, and even his friends and relatives, because he chose to be aligned with Christ. "Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake. Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you." (Mt 5:11-12).

"respect unto the recompence of the reward"

This phrase really means Moses 'looked away from everything else and focused on the reward'. He turned his eyes away from all the world had to offer in this life and turned toward the reward in Christ.

What opportunities does life present to you? If you do well in your career, where could you go? If you save hard or invest in your hobbies, what satisfaction could you receive? How do each of those opportunities compare to living forever?

If we consider "the recompence of the reward" a more precious treasure than the wealth or prestige this world can offer, then we need to stop looking at this world's opportunities – cut off the lusts, turn away from the worldly ambitions, and commit whole-heartedly to Christ.



**Who else in Scripture gave up great prominence or opportunities for the sake of Christ?
What do we know of the reward that is in store for them?**

WILL GODLY DECISIONS MAKE LIFE EASIER?

Moses had stepped out in faith, forsaking Egypt and choosing to be with Israel. We might imagine that God was going to bless his decision immediately. But no, it all went horribly wrong for Moses. First he killed an Egyptian to defend his brother, then he was rejected by his brethren and forced to flee Egypt, with a death warrant on him from Pharaoh (Ex 2:11-15). Moses then had to wait 40 long years before God called him, at which point we find he had lost every ounce of confidence!

We may wonder why all this happened. Sometimes we might step out in faith, and then not everything goes to plan. Acting in faith does not guarantee that all will be easy. The Father may choose to test our faith and give us trials for the development of our character.

27 *By faith he forsook Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king: for he endured, as seeing him who is invisible.*

"Not fearing the wrath of the king"

This is not referring to the first time that Moses left Egypt, because he did not do this in faith, and he was afraid of the King - "*Moses feared... Moses fled*" (Ex 2:14-15).

Rather this is the second time in Egypt, when Moses demanded of Pharaoh that he let Israel go. Interestingly, when God called Moses in the wilderness, he was devoid of all self-confidence, and tried eight times to give God a reason that he couldn't lead the Exodus (Ex 3:11,13; 4:1,10,13; 5:22; 6:12,30). But when it came to facing Pharaoh, Moses was unflinching. Whilst he had no confidence in his own abilities, he did not fear Pharaoh this time in the slightest, even though he had more reason to do so. Moses' constant antagonism towards Pharaoh could have resulted in an order for his death. He repeatedly said to Pharaoh, "*Thus saith Yahweh God of the Hebrews, Let my people go.*" (Ex 7:16, 9:1,13), and even advised him, "*let not Pharaoh deal deceitfully any more*" (Ex 8:29)! Clearly Moses demonstrated extraordinary faith in God's strength and power over Pharaoh's!

Who do you fear? Are you afraid of other people and what they might think?

The Hebrews would doubtless incite the anger of their superiors in choosing to leave. Moses stood as a wonderful example of fortitude despite opposition.

"as seeing him who is invisible"

This statement is a paradox. Moses saw someone who *cannot* be seen. Faith is the "*evidence of things not seen*" (v1). Yahweh is indeed invisible: "*whom no man hath seen, nor can see*" (1Tim 6:15). The point for Moses was that Yahweh, though invisible, was more real than Pharaoh, and was to be feared far more than Pharaoh. Christ triumphed in the same way, "*I have set Yahweh always before me: because he is at my right hand, I shall not be moved*" (Psa 16:8).

The implied message to the Hebrews was that Yahweh – though He is invisible – should be more real to them than the Romans and the Zealots who were terrorising the people of Jerusalem.

Do we see Yahweh as more real than the people of the world? Do we shrink from telling people of the gospel because we fear man's reaction more than God's?

28 *Through faith he kept the passover, and the sprinkling of blood, lest he that destroyed the firstborn should touch them.*

Sprinkling *"proschisis"* (4378) – a pouring or sprinkling upon

He that destroyed *"olothreuo"* (3645) – the destroyer

"Through faith he kept the Passover"

By faith Moses carefully kept the Passover, understanding the type of the deliverance from sin that would be achieved by the lamb of God. *"For even Christ our Passover is sacrificed for us"* (1Cor 5:7). The use of the singular pronoun *"he"* would indicate that Israel's keeping of the Passover was not by faith.

"and the sprinkling of blood"

Moses would know the divinely established principle that *"without the shedding of blood there is no remission of sins"* (Heb 9:22). Hence it is separately mentioned that he was careful that the blood was sprinkled on the doorposts and lintels (Ex 12:7).

"lest he that destroyed the firstborn should touch them"

Better *"lest the destroyer of the firstborn should touch them"*. Moses was concerned that if the sprinkling of blood was not done properly that the destroying angel charged with killing all the firstborn of the Egyptians (Ex 12:29) would touch *"them"* – Israel. Here we see the spirit of Christ in Moses in the great love and care he had for Israel – **he** keeps the Passover so that **they** are saved.

Israel were God's firstborn. The destroyer was coming in the form of the Roman armies. If the brethren were to receive deliverance, they would need to respond to this warning and not forsake *"the blood of the Covenant"* which some were treading under foot (Heb 10:29).

There was only one lot of blood that would save them. The other religious institutions in Jerusalem, no matter how Godly or pious they may appear, could not save. They had to remain faithful to Christ.

The *"angel of death"* discriminated based upon personal faith and obedience, not upon national association.

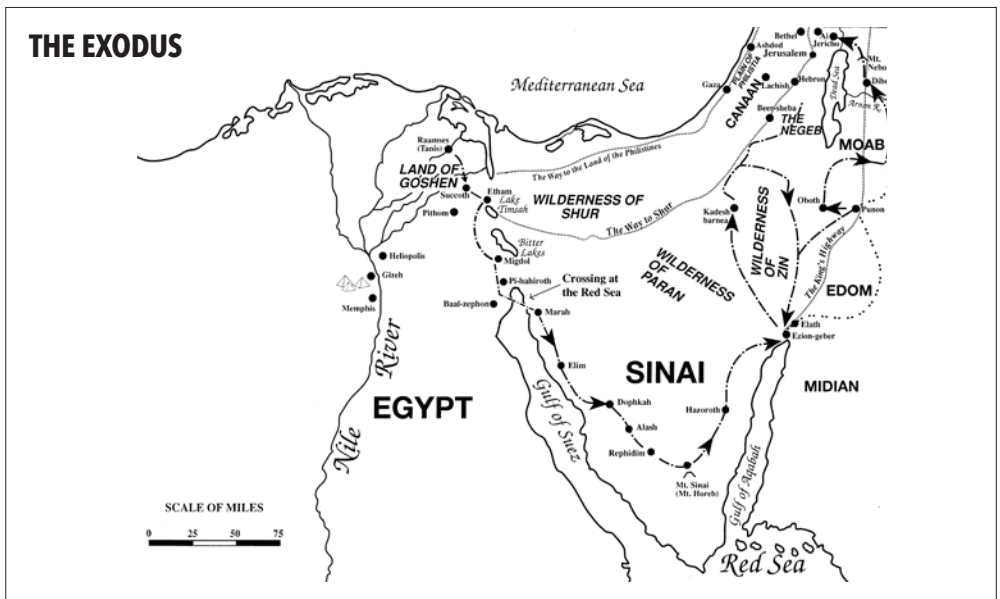
ISRAEL

THE CROSSING OF THE RED SEA

29 *By faith they passed through the Red sea as by dry land: which the Egyptians assaying to do were drowned.*

Assaying "peira" (3984) – to make a trial

God led Israel to the shores of the Red Sea (Ex 14:2). He could have taken them around the top of Red Sea, as is evident from the map below. Instead, He took them to the edge of the sea that they might be trapped there (Ex 14:10-13,19-20). There was nothing Israel could do to save themselves – so they believed and were saved.



"By faith they"

Moses kept the Passover by faith (v28), but "they" (Israel) passed through the Red Sea by faith. This is the only recorded act of faith of Israel during the 40 years journey to the land (Ex 14:31).

"passed through the Red Sea"

Once the waters opened up and there was a way to walk across the seabed it would require faith to actually go down and walk through between the walls of water (cp. Ex 14:22). If the walls of water collapsed, one would certainly drown just like the Egyptians. When they crossed the Red Sea, Israel were "baptised into Moses" (1Cor 10:2). This they did in faith (Psa 106:12).

"which the Egyptians assaying to do were drowned"

The faith of the Israelites is set against the backdrop of the unbelieving Egyptians. They tried to go through the sea, but walked by sight and not by faith, and hence were drowned. God's opportunity for salvation was not indiscriminate – faith would be needed.

THE ONE OPPORTUNITY

Passing through the Red Sea was an incredible miracle. Just like their forefathers, the Hebrews were soon to find themselves in a situation where they would be trapped (Ex 14:3; Lk 21:20). The Roman armies swarmed around the city walls, like the Egyptian Army that bore down upon the Israelites. God was going to present them with an opportunity to flee when the Romans retreated from Jerusalem. The faithful would have to take this opportunity.

[WITHOUT FAITH THEY...]

Israel started their journey by faith, but when the trials of the wilderness came their faith evaporated. Instead of believing in God, they began to lust, worship idols, commit immorality, tempt Christ and murmur.

This failure of faith stands as an example to us – *“written for our admonition”* as well as the Brethren before AD 70, *“upon whom the ends of the age are come”* (1Cor 10:5-12). When they finally reached Kadesh Barnea in Number 14, on the border of the Promised Land, *“they could not enter because of unbelief”* (Heb 3:19).

THE WALLS OF JERICHO FALL

30 *By faith the walls of Jericho fell down, after they were compassed about seven days.*

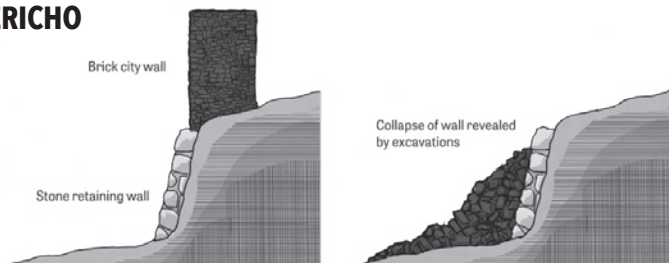
“By faith”

Whose faith? It is not stated. It is implied that it is the faith of Joshua and the people.

“the walls of Jericho fell down”

The archaeological findings of Professor Garstang and others at the city of Jericho have remarkably demonstrated that the walls fell *outwards* rather than *inwards* at the destruction of the city. This is most unusual for a besieged city – the walls would usually fall inwards as a result of the battering rams pounding from the outside. However, as the illustration shows, excavations at Jericho have discovered that there were two walls around Jericho, and that the bricks of the lower wall were found in a pile to the left of the lower retaining wall. The walls did indeed fall outwards.

WALLS OF JERICHO



“compassed about seven days”

God required Israel to march around the city of Jericho once each day for six days and then seven times on the seventh day. This would require a great deal of faith because it is obvious to all that this is not the rational approach to overcoming a fortress. Imagine the people of Jericho on the walls. After a few days they would be jeering at Israel (Cp. Neh 2:19). God’s methods often appear strange. For example, Naaman had to wash seven times in the Jordan. Christ asked his disciples to be ready to feed a multitude of 5000 when they had only 5 loaves and 2 fish!

Why mention this to the Hebrews?

The fall of Jericho appeared impossible. Especially given the ‘military tactics’ the Israelites were using. Those on the walls must have mocked, yet the Israelites still had to act in faith despite the ridicule. The other observation from the Jericho story was that the walls did fall. If God says the walls will fall, they’ll fall. This then lays the backdrop for the next example.

RAHAB

31 *By faith the harlot Rahab perished not with them that believed not, when she had received the spies with peace.*

Harlot “*porne*” (4204) – harlot, prostitute.

Rahab “*Rhaab*” (4460) – wide, broad. Prostitutes are described as broad, proud and arrogant (Jer 3:3)

Believed not “*apeitheo*” (544) – not to believe, or not to obey. The word is consistently used in the NT of those who reject the Truth, rather than a temporary wavering of faith. Used in LXX of disobedience to the 10 commandments (Exod 23:21) & of the Law (Lev 26:15)

All inside the city of Jerusalem were at risk from the invading army (v30) and the salvation of each individual relied upon their personal faith in God and commitment to the blood of the Covenant (v29). Now Paul illustrates just how extensive God’s saving power was – if the Hebrews would but show a little faith. God could – and did – even save a harlot!

“By faith the harlot Rahab”

It would appear that although Rahab had been a harlot, she had changed before the spies even reached her house. In Joshua 2:6, we are told that she had flax drying on the roof. It was the time of Passover which was also the time for harvesting flax. It is possible that Rahab had changed her occupation to making linen from flax, which may be symbolic of her change of character to embrace Godly ways (cp. Prov 31:13; Rev 19:8; Ex 27:9 where fine linen, made from flax, represented righteousness).

Rahab’s confession of faith to the spies is nothing short of astounding:

- “I know that Yahweh **hath** given you the land” (Josh 2:9). She uses the past tense – In her mind the battle was already over, yet Israel had not conquered anything west of the Jordan yet!

- "We have heard how Yahweh dried up the water of the Red Sea" (Josh 2:10). This event had happened 40 years earlier and yet she had faith in Yahweh because of this! She might not have even been born then. Does the Israeli victory in the 6-day war of 1967 thrill us with the evidence of God's hand in the earth? It is hard for something that happened 40 years ago to have a profound effect still. But it did for Rahab.
- "For Yahweh your God, he is God in heaven above and in earth beneath" (Josh 2:11). The Gentiles believed in a multitude of gods, all of which had only localised power in particular areas. To acknowledge a God which has universal dominion was a major declaration of faith. To add to this, she was quoting Deuteronomy 4:39! How did she know this quote?

Israel had been instructed to destroy all the inhabitants of Jericho, apart from Rahab and her family (Josh 6:17, 21). From a legalistic point of view, if the Canaanites were evil and should have all been killed – what could be worse than a Canaanitish prostitute?! On basis of Law she would be one of first to die in Jericho. But she was saved by faith.

It is interesting to observe that the saving of Rahab by faith is grouped with two amazing miracles:

- v29 – By faith Israel passed through the Red Sea
- v30 – By faith the walls of Jericho fell down
- v31 – By faith Rahab perished not

This was a monument to the Hebrews that God's offer of salvation by faith is not discriminatory. He extends it in grace. It is offered to anyone, regardless of their history. They simply need to *believe* in the one true God and His Son, and *turn their life* to follow him. Rahab the harlot did this. No brother or sister could say that God couldn't save him or her – Rahab was witness to that. She stood alone – her and her house – in receiving the messengers of God's salvation. Everyone else in Jericho "*believed not*", but because Rahab was prepared to stand apart, she and her house were saved.

THINKING AHEAD (v32-40)

- Why is Samson – who had a problem with women – included here, when others like Joshua, Phinehas, Ehud and Jonathan are not?
- Why is Samson's inclusion so encouraging for us?
- Who are the aliens of v34?
- Make a list of examples of people who performed these the acts of faith noted in v33-35.
- What is the great lesson we learn from the little phrase "*and others*" in v35?
- Which Prophet fits v36 precisely?
- Why do we find being mocked so hard to bear?
- What is the "*better thing*" we have that they did not get?



FAITH'S
CONQUERORS,
SUFFERERS &
WITNESSES

CHAPTER 11:32-40


CONQUERORS

In this section there is a brief reference to those who were victorious in faith. It shows the amazing things that Yahweh can do when people show faith.

32 *And what shall I more say? for the time would fail me to tell of Gedeon, and of Barak, and of Samson, and of Jephthae; of David also, and Samuel, and of the prophets:*

As an indication that there are many more characters whose acts of faith could be discussed for the benefit of the Hebrews and ourselves, the record now lists just 6 more people without referring in particular to what they did.

Five of these are from the period of the Judges and David is of course one of the first kings of Israel. It is noteworthy that there are 3 pairs here. Each pair is listed in reverse chronological order. For example, Gideon (Jud 6-8) is mentioned before Barak (Jud 4-5), when in fact Barak came first in the chronology of Judges. The order cannot be accidental.

 **Why are each of the three pairs of characters in Heb 11:32 listed in the opposite order to which they lived chronologically?**

“The time would fail me”

Perhaps this is a hint to the urgency with which this letter was written. Surely Paul could spend a little longer explaining what he meant by these six men of faith and the prophets who followed! In fact, he is limited by time. He needs the letter to reach them soon. The day of opportunity may not last long.

Consider first **Gideon** and **Barak**. They are primarily noted for their battles, which were won by faith. Neither were great warriors in their own eyes (Jud 6:15; 4:8), yet God viewed them differently (Jud 6:12; 5:12). Barak, together with Deborah, gathered many from tribes of Israel to Mt Tabor and from there went down to confront the chariots of the Canaanites in the valley of Jezreel. The great victory God gave them is recorded in Judges 4 & 5. While Barak had many people from several tribes, Gideon’s force was reduced by Yahweh to just 300 men. Gideon led his men in a great victory over the Midianites and the Amalekites in the valley of Jezreel, in the same place that Yahweh gave Barak victory by faith (Jud 7).

Next, consider **Samson** and **Jephthah**. Jephthah led the tribes on the east of the Jordan to victory over the Ammonites (Jud 11-12). However the tribe of Ephraim were angry with him and Jephthah ended up having a major battle with them – a battle against his own countrymen! In the case of Samson (Judges 13-16) he had almost no support from any in Israel. He took the Philistines on single-handedly. Samson also found that his countrymen were against him. In

Judges 15:11-12 three thousand men of Judah came to him to give him over to the Philistines because they were scared of the Philistines. Despite his failings in other areas, Samson was an outstanding example of victory by faith as he stood almost alone in the nation.

In the case of **David** and **Samuel**, the outstanding achievement of them both is not so much the battles, but the spiritual reformation they led in Israel. Samuel started the reformation and established the Schools of the Prophets in strategic places in the land. He was then able to get the people to return to Yahweh (1 Sam 7:3-6). David, as king, managed a much greater spiritual reformation of the people to the point where he not only had Israel worshipping Yahweh but many of the Gentile nations around were converted to love and serve Yahweh (such as the people of Tyre - 1Ki 5:1,7).

In looking at each of these six characters it can also be seen that they exemplified faith's strength out of human weakness:

Person	Faith's strength out of human weakness
Gideon	Won against a multitude of Midianites with 300 scared men
Barak	Went to battle only with support of a woman – not named here
Samson	Slew a multitude with jawbone of an ass
Jephthah	Son of a harlot, rejected by Israel
David	Despised of his brethren, killed Goliath with a sling and a stone
Samuel	Young boy in an evil environment

33-35a *Who through faith subdued kingdoms, wrought righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, Quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness were made strong, waxed valiant in fight, turned to flight the armies of the aliens. Women received their dead raised to life again:*

Subdued *"katagonizomai"* (2610) – struggle against; conquer

Quenched *"sbennumi"* (4570) – to extinguish,

Violence *"dunamis"* (1411) - power

Edge *"stoma"* (4750) - mouth

Sword *"macheira"* (3162) – short sword, large knife. Compared to long Thracian sword *"rhomphaia"* (4501)

Valiant *"ischuros"* (2478) – strong, mighty

In these verses there are 10 examples of the effects of faith:

1. subdued kingdoms,
2. wrought righteousness,
3. obtained promises,
4. stopped the mouths of lions,
5. quenched the violence of fire,
6. escaped the edge of the sword,
7. out of weakness were made strong,


8. waxed valiant in fight,
9. turned to flight the armies of the aliens,
10. women received their dead raised to life again

The number ten is often used to represent a larger number of things (e.g., Neh 4:12; Dan 1:20; Zech 8:23). Notice that there are also 10 examples of the way in which people suffered for their faith (v35-38). Paul seems to be trying to impress a point. If 10 represents a larger number of things, perhaps he is wanting us to step back and consider the whole panorama of the Jewish existence. Where in the history of the nation had men and women of faith simply “fitted in” with those around them? Faith’s conquerors have almost never been in the majority; yet through them Yahweh wrought great victories in the end.

This may well explain why Paul named 10 specific characters in Hebrews 11:4-31 to show the way in which faith was exemplified in their lives. These are not the ‘greatest examples’ of faith, but rather, these 10 individuals represent all those who stood out against their contemporaries to act on their belief in the living God. Paul wants the Hebrews to understand that this is the call to all of God’s servants. The journey to the Kingdom is not simply a comfortable ride of conformity and compromise; living by faith may involve standing out of the crowd – standing up for your faith in Christ. It may result in victory over the enemy and relief from the trial, or it may lead to rejection by friends and deep personal loss.

The table below shows how that the six men of faith listed in the previous verse and others exemplified these characteristics.

Attribute	Gideon	Barak	Samson	Jephthah	David	Samuel
Subdued kingdoms					✓	
Wrought righteousness	✓				✓	✓
Obtained promises					✓	
Stopped the mouths of lions	Daniel		✓		✓	
Quenched the violence of fire	Shadrach, Meshach & Abednego					
Escaped the edge of the sword	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Out of weakness were made strong	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Waxed valiant in fight	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Turned to flight the armies of the aliens	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Women received their dead raised to life again	Elijah & Elisha					

 **It may be a useful exercise to construct a table similar to the one above, including references and any other examples of men and women who were victorious over this world through faith.**



Consider how relevant each of these scenarios would be for the Brethren of AD 70. Faced with the armies and arenas of the Roman Empire, many of these acts of faith would bear a pertinent application to the Hebrews, and so be a source of great comfort.

SUFFERERS

But what if everything went wrong in the life of a believer? What if they were caught by the Romans or the Zealots? What if they were persecuted for holding to Christ? What if they lost family members, or even just their occupation, for the Truth?

The letter now takes a sudden change to consider those that were not conquerors – but sufferers for the faith they held. As noted before, if stepping out in faith always resulted in triumph, faith would no longer be required. Consequently, brothers and sisters in the past and present have had to suffer greatly for the faith they professed. Their willingness to suffer stands as lasting testimony to their utter conviction of the things they believed.

35b *and others were tortured, not accepting deliverance; that they might obtain a better resurrection:*

Tortured “*tumpanizo*” (5178) – only occurrence. To torture with a tympanum.

Deliverance “*apolutrosis*” (629) – redemption. Occ 10x. All 9 other occ. are translated “redemption”. These brethren did not accept redemption from suffering, preferring to die that they might have true redemption in Christ at the resurrection.

“Tortured ”

The picture here is of cruel torture with a tympanum. The tympanum seems to have been a wheel shaped instrument of torture, over which criminals were stretched as though they were skins and then horribly beaten with clubs or lashed. The brethren subjected to this did not take the easy way out by accepting deliverance, but endured to have a “*better resurrection*”. The term “*better*” in Hebrews carries the idea of **vastly** better and is used frequently in the book as shown in the background section of these notes under the heading of other themes.

The better resurrection is in comparison to the reference earlier in v35 to “*dead raised to life again*”. The word for resurrection is “*anastasis*” which carries the idea of standing up. If you would simply recant your beliefs while being tortured, you would be permitted to stand up again. But these people wanted a better “standing up” – not just to mortal life, but to life eternal. When we consider the circumstances of these brothers and sisters compared to our own, we realise that in comparison to them we have nothing to murmur about.

Do we ever “take back” or shy away from a word preached in the name of Christ?

36-37 *And others had trial of cruel mockings and scourgings, yea, moreover of bonds and imprisonment: They were stoned, they were sawn asunder, were tempted, were slain with the sword: they wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins; being destitute, afflicted, tormented;*

Scourgings "mastix" (3148) – whipping, flogging


Sawn asunder "epirthesan" (4249) – to cut in two with a saw. Only occurrence.

Were tempted "epeirasthesan" (3985) – to make a trial, to solicit to sin, tempt, try, assay, prove. Some manuscripts leave this word out and some commentators believe that because it is so similar to the word for "sawn asunder" (see above) that it is a copyist's error. One can imagine a copyist getting a word wrong, but to repeat a word and make an error in its repetition and making it another known word seems unlikely. Some manuscripts have instead the word "epirsthan" - "they were burned". This seems a more credible copyist error.

Slain with the sword "phonos" (5408) - murdered

Afflicted "thlibo" (2346) – to press hard upon, compressed, under pressure. This is the verb equivalent of the noun *thlipsis* which is frequently translated "tribulation, affliction". The overall sense is of feeling under enormous pressure.

The picture painted is one of great trial, of having to endure terrible, merciless cruelty. Worst of all, there was no prospect of relief before the Kingdom. It would be expected that the kind of trials described here would also involve major mental trials as well. Loneliness, ridicule, and malicious slander are often precursors to physical torture as evidenced in the lives of those that protested against the Catholic Church in the times of the Reformation.

 **"The Protestors", by Bro Alan Eyre, provides graphic insight into how dire were the circumstances of later brethren who stood for Christ in the face of similar trials.**

The fact that they "*wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins*" is an indication that they were outcasts from society and were not able to buy garments of woven fabric or make their own. They were ostracised from their community for standing for what they believed. Instead, they were limited to clothing that was crude and uncomfortable, and a lifestyle exposed to the elements. The Greek word for sheepskins is found nowhere else in the NT, and in the LXX it is used exclusively for Elijah's mantle (1Ki 19:13,19). The Hebrews would instantly recognise this. Elijah was held in the highest esteem by the Jews – even today they keep a seat vacant for Elijah at their Passover meal. The implied message to the Hebrews, who in leaving Jerusalem were likely to have to be strangers and pilgrims among the Gentiles, is that their lot can't be any harder than Elijah's. When we reflect on our own comfortable circumstances compared to that of Elijah we ought never complain!

Again, 10 experiences which men and women suffered for their faith are listed, reminding the readers that this is the story of the faithful throughout the ages – many conquered, but many also suffered terribly, for their faith:

1. tortured,
2. mockings,
3. scourgings,
4. bonds,
5. imprisonment,

6. stoned,
7. sawn asunder,
8. tempted,
9. butchered by the sword,
10. wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins; being destitute, afflicted, tormented.

The following table lists some examples of people who suffered these cruelties.

Attribute	Examples
Tortured	Whilst not included in the Bible, the apocryphal books contain interesting history of the period between the Testaments. The book of 2Maccabees, Chpt 6 & 7 refer to horrific forms of torture.
Mockings	Jeremiah Jer 20:7-8; others 2Chr 36:16
Scourgings	Jer 20:2 (implied). The Law provided for this as punishment - Lev 19:20
Bonds & imprisonment	Joseph Gen 39:20; Micaiah 1Ki 22:26-27; Hanani 2Chr 16:10; Jeremiah Jer 37:15
Stoned	Naboth 1 Kin 21:13; Zechariah son of Jehoiada; 2Chr 24:20-22; Jeremiah? (Encyc. Britannica)
Sawn asunder	Jewish tradition (Babylonian Talmud) says that Isaiah was sawn asunder by Manasseh king of Judah. Considering the evil recorded of Manasseh (2Ki 24:4) this may well have happened.
Tempted	Word may be "burned" (see notes on v37); Cp. The 3 friends Dan 3:21
Butchered by sword	Urijah Jer 26:20,23; Priests 1Sam 22:18-19
Wandered in sheepskins and goatskins...	Under persecution, the faithful needed to live away from civilisation – only basic clothing would be available. E.g. Elijah (LXX for mantle is sheepskin) 1Ki 19:13,19, 2Ki 2:13-14; Other prophets Zech 13:4

38 (Of whom the world was not worthy:) they wandered in deserts, and in mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth.

Deserts *"eremia"* (2047) – an uninhabited place. Vine: *"it does not always denote a barren region devoid of vegetation"*

Dens *"spelaeion"* (4693) – a cave. Used of the tomb of Lazarus (Jn 11:38).

Caves *"ope"* (3692) – a fissure in the rock, a crack, an opening in the rock.

The world was not worthy of these people. The proclamation of the word of God to the sinful people of the time was a greater privilege than they deserved.

When the believers were being persecuted, association with towns or inhabited areas invited trouble, so many had to live away from all this. For example, David, with his 400 men, lived in the cave of Adullam and then at the cave of Engedi (1Sam 22:1, 23:29, 24:3).

Paul is illustrating the way in which these faithful brothers and sisters were expelled from society and had to live in the uninhabited places. To be on the receiving end of such hatred from their peers – to the extent that they were not even allowed to live in society – is hard to imagine.

WITNESSES

39-40 *And these all, having obtained a good report through faith, received not the promise: God having provided some better thing for us, that they without us should not be made perfect.*

Having obtained "*martureo*" (3140) – to bear witness.
a good report

Having provided "*problepo*" (4265) - to foresee. Only occurrence in NT. Only one occ in LXX – Psa 37:13, where the context is highly significant (Psa 37:1-3,10-11).

some "*tis*" (5100) - certain

They should be "*teleiothosin*" from "*teleioo*" (5048) – complete, mature, perfect
made perfect

These verses are the conclusion of the review of the faithful, with the exception of our Lord Jesus Christ who is referenced in the first few verses of Chapter 12. Because this is the end of the review of the faithful some of the themes of Chapter 11 (as detailed in the background section of these notes) are brought together here:

- **Witness** – the powerful witness to God that these faithful showed
- **Promises** – the trust of the faithful in God's promises and not in the Law or in themselves
- **Better** – the things of faith and the prospect of the Kingdom are much better than any enjoyment to be had in life now.

"That they without us should not be made perfect"

This is an incredible display of God's wisdom, His long-suffering, and His grace towards us. All the trials of these believers would have hurt Him immensely (cp. Isa 63:9), yet He allowed the ages to continue, according to His Word, so that "*they without us should not be made perfect*"!

When under trial we long for Christ's coming so that the trial will be over and the joys of the Kingdom will replace present difficulties. The faithful in each age would also have had such a desire for the return of Christ to alleviate their trials. If Yahweh had concluded the ages earlier because of their persistent appeals for Christ's coming, we would never have had the opportunity of life eternal. How blessed we are that Yahweh has allowed time to go on that we might have the hope of the kingdom too.

THINKING AHEAD (12:1-3)

- Who are the "*cloud of witnesses*" of 12:1?
- How is the Greek word for "*race*" in 12:1 used in the New Testament?
- What is the difference between "*weight*" and "*sin*" in v1?
- How is Jesus the "*author and finisher of faith*"?
- What Psalm is Paul alluding to at the end of v2?
- Who are the "*contradiction of sinners*" that Jesus faced?



THE GREATEST
EXAMPLE
OF FAITH

CHAPTER 12:1-3

JESUS CHRIST

The final section deals with the greatest example of faith in human history – our Lord Jesus Christ. He is the great founder and archetype of faith. So great was his faith, and so extensive his sacrifice, that we may struggle to truly appreciate the magnitude of both.

Pause and allocate some time in your day or week to sit down and meditate upon the extent of Christ's faith and what it drove him to do. Only in this way will we appreciate the power of his example.

The writer to the Hebrews has brought his readers, little by little, to the feet of the Lord Jesus Christ. By type and by example, the believers in past ages have prefigured and looked towards their Lord, and finally we – together with the Hebrews – are going to be drawn to his example.

The first few verses of Hebrews 12 take up the metaphor of the marathon footrace and the stadium. This is the race for eternal life. It is not a sprint; it is a long marathon.

1 *Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us,*

Wherefore	<i>"toigaroun"</i> (5105) – The Greek word is a very strong particle of inference not found elsewhere in the NT except 1Thes 4:8.
Cloud	<i>"nephos"</i> (3509) – a cloud, a large dense multitude, a throng
Weight	<i>"Ogkos"</i> (3591) – bulk, and by extension weight. Only occurrence.
Which doth so easily beset us	<i>"euperistatos"</i> (2139) – that which closely clings to limbs as an enfolding robe. Only occurrence.
Run	<i>"trecho"</i> (5143) – to run. Thayer tells us this word is used in Greek writings to describe <i>"extreme peril, which it requires the exertion of all one's effort to overcome"</i>
Patience	<i>"hupomone"</i> (5281) – endurance, perseverance. Again, Thayer tells us that this word describes <i>"in the NT the characteristic of a man who is not swerved from his deliberate purpose and his loyalty to faith and piety by even the reatest trials and sufferings"</i>
Race	<i>"agon"</i> (73) – conflict. Thayer: <i>"the place of contest, the arena or stadium"</i>

“Wherefore”

The Greek word is a very strong particle of inference. The writer is saying, “*Therefore, on the basis of everything that has gone before...*”

“cloud of witnesses”

A cloud is often used in Scripture as a metaphor for a great multitude. For example, Ezekiel 38:9,16 uses a cloud to describe Gog coming down as “*a cloud to cover the Land*”. Cp. Rev 1:7; Dan 7:13.

Even the Greek and Roman worlds in which the Hebrews found themselves, referred to a large gathering of people as a ‘cloud’. Homer, a Greek poet, speaks of “*a cloud of foot soldiers*”.¹⁶ A collection of gods is called “the clouds” in an ancient Greek play that bears that name.

But there is more to this analogy that Paul is drawing on here. Sure, the clouds represent a multitude of people, but here they represent a *specific* multitude. The seats in the upper levels of a Greek stadium were the most prestigious seats, and those who occupied them were termed “*the cloud*”. As he prepares to encourage his readers to “*run with patience*” the race of life, Paul directs their attention to the grandstand. There, looking down upon the track, is the “cloud of witnesses” from past ages who have *already* run the race. They have endured the pain and attained outstanding victories by belief in God’s ability. Seated in the prestigious upper levels of the stadium, these faithful from throughout history are cheering us on down the final stretch, urging us not to give up, in the assurance that the crown will be worth the pain.

“let us lay aside every weight”

The word for weight (see above) literally means ‘*bulk*’. In Greek, as applied to athletes, it refers to “superfluous flesh” which is to be reduced by training. It represents anything that we might indulge in that makes us unfit for the race. This may not necessarily be sin – it may just be hobbies or distractions that hinder us from running the race of life.

It would be helpful for each of us to make a list of the “weights” we are carrying as we run the race to the Kingdom. What hobbies or distractions are we carrying?

“and the sin which doth so easily beset us”

Sin is then represented as ‘robes or clothing’ that cling to us, inhibiting our ability to run the race, making us stumble and fall. Like the Hebrews we need to avoid being caught up in sin as it will make us stumble and even worse can stop us running the race.

Do we have sins that stick to us and we can’t get rid of? Do we need help to remove them? David – an athlete from the past – needed the help of Nathan to remove sins in his life. Perhaps we need the same?

“let us run”

This Greek word is frequently used by Paul to describe the race of life: Rom 9:16; 1Cor 9:24,26; Gal 2:2; 5:7; Php 2:16.

¹⁶Refer Dean Farrer on *Hebrews*, Cambridge Bible Commentary on 12:1

“with patience”

“Patience” – should be “endurance”. It is a long race. Unwavering resolve is needed to keep going. We need to pace ourselves. We cannot just sprint then tire; we must maintain consistent exertion if we are to cross the finish line.

“the race”

Greek “agon”, literally “conflict”. The English word “agony” comes from this word. This race involves agony and pain – it is a hard race. There are records of marathon runners that pushed themselves so hard that they died in the process of winning. There are some that seek an easy and comfortable way of being a Christadelphian; Paul says that way does not exist.

There is a big difference with this race from that of the Greek Games, however. There are not just prizes for those that are first, second and third. In the race for eternal life *all those* that run to the end and cross the finish line are winners and enter the Kingdom (but only by the grace of God v15). We do not have to beat other brothers and sisters to be in Kingdom, we just have to continue to run the race alongside them, helping them to finish the race as well.

Very significantly, the same word “agon” is used by the Apostle Paul at the conclusion of his own race. In 2Timothy 4:7 he writes, “*I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith.*” The Greek words are interesting: “*I have **agonizomai** a good **agon**, I have finished my **dromos**, I have kept the **pistis**.*” Paul had struggled and fought his way to the end of the agonizing race of life. He had run around the race course, and all the while had maintained the faith. His reward? “*A crown of righteousness*” (2Tim 4:8). This is the *stephanos* – the laurel wreath of victory that was given in the Greek games.

“that is set before us”

We don’t know what will happen from day to day, but we should be able to see the way to the kingdom.

2 ***Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God.***

Looking unto “*aphorao*” (872) – to turn the eyes away from other things and fix them on something.

Author “*archegos*” (747) – prince, chief leader, captain. Carries the idea of leader who is out the front, leading by example. Only occ 4x: “prince” Acts 3:15; 5:31; “captain” of our salvation Heb 2:10; author Heb 12:2.

Finisher “*teleiotes*” (5051) – to complete, perfect, finish

Despising “*kataphroneo*” (2706) - disregard

The imagery is of Jesus at the finishing line encouraging us to keep going. We therefore need to keep our gaze on him and not be distracted with the things of the world. Paul uses a similar idea in Philippians 3:14: “*I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.*”

“Looking unto Jesus”

The Greek for “*looking unto*” means “*look away from one thing so as to see another*”, in this

case, to see Jesus. Like Moses, we need to turn our eyes away from all the distractions and focus on Christ (11:26).

Notice that it is "Jesus", not "Christ", who is put forward as the ultimate example of faithful endurance. This is because Christ refers to our Lord as the "Anointed" king and priest; whereas in this part of Hebrews we are looking at "Jesus" – the man who ran the long and lonely race of life – who was "*in all points tempted like as we are,*" yet finished the race. Now, because of his victory, he can help us complete the race – he can "*save the people from their sins*" (Mt 1:21).

"author and finisher of our faith"

A better translation for this is "*leader and completer of faith*". The word "our" is not in the text. Jesus is the leader of faith – he is out the front leading by example. He is the completer of faith. Jesus' leadership results in finishing the race for life. There is the implied contrast with Moses who could not bring his people to the finish; they stumbled and fell in the race because of their unbelief (Heb 3:19).

We often think about our faith in Christ, but it is helpful to reflect on his faith in his Father. In the gospels we read of the powerful personal presence of Jesus; he was unmoved by almost any difficult circumstance. Throughout all his trials, our Lord's faith never wavered. The faith that our Lord needed to accomplish his work is worth thinking about. He had to believe that the evil men of his day would not kill him before the time appointed. Our Lord went to the cross believing that the Father would indeed raise him from the dead on the third day. He had to have the faith that he would not only be raised but also made immortal and that he would be taken into heaven to see his Father for the first time. These are all miraculous things well outside the experience of normal life.

"for the joy that was set before him"

The secret of Jesus' victory was the joy before him:

- The prospect of going to be with His father – Psa 16:11; John 14:28
- The vision of seeing his brethren redeemed – Heb 2:10
- The anticipation of God praised among men – Psa 22:25,27
- The end of fighting against the temptations to sin with flesh gone and replaced by immortality

"endured the cross"

The Hebrews would have to go through trials, but they like us, could be inspired to persevere in faith by the Lord's example of enduring the cross.

"is set down on the right hand of the throne of God"

Better: "*Hath sat down*" – this means the task is finished. Earlier in Hebrews, Paul drew a contrast between the Aaronic Priests who "*stand daily*" serving in the Temple, but "*which can never take away sins*", and Christ, who "*offered one sacrifice for sins for ever, [then] sat down on the right hand of God.*" (Heb 10:11-12). The results of Jesus' victory are permanent. His prize for running the race? Second place in the universe, at the right hand of God.

These words are actually a quotation from Psalm 110:1 "*Yahweh said unto my Lord, Sit thou at my right hand, until I make thine enemies thy footstool*". This Psalm has been repeatedly quoted in Hebrews (1:3, 5:6,10, 6:20, 7:17,21). In these places where Psalm 110 is quoted, it is showing that Christ is a better high priest, being after the order of Melchisedek. On the Day of Atonement,

the Aaronic High priest brought the blood of animals into the presence of God in the Most Holy place to seek forgiveness of sins for the people. Making atonement for the sins of the people didn't cost the Aaronic High Priest anything personally. What a contrast with Christ, the High Priest after the order of Melchisedek. The cost to Christ in making atonement for our sins was an enormous personal cost – it was his own blood, his own life, that he brought in before the presence of God.

So why allude to this here? Christ is not just encouraging us to have a living faith so that we successfully run the race of life; he has the personal investment of his own blood in our spiritual lives and passionately wants us to finish the race and be given the crown of righteousness.

3 *For consider him that endured such contradiction of sinners against himself, lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds.*

Contradiction *"antilogia"* (485) – gainsaying

Wearied *"kamno"* (2577) – to become weary, "*carries idea of having quickly become wearied*" (Farrer)

Faint *"ekluo"* (1590) – to dissolve, to weaken, to relax. "*gradual relaxation of nerve and energy, perhaps through exhaustion*" (Farrer)

Minds *"psuche"* (5590) – soul, life.

All through his ministry, but particularly in the last days of the Lord's life, people on all sides tried to trick him, gainsay his words, tempt him to sin or force him to break. He never gave in.

The Hebrews were in danger of abandoning the race because of being wearied (through recent troubles) and faint (through exhaustion from many days of pilgrimage). They are urged to compare their position with the troubles that Christ experienced.

CONCLUSION



CONCLUSION

So ends the account of faith's conquerors. We have come to know the lives of men and women who were transformed by the faith they embraced. We have seen individuals who faced the most difficult of challenges:

A man who lost his life to serve God.

A man who was taken – saved by God because of the message he shared.

A man who built an enormous boat when the entire world ridiculed his faith.

A man who left everything he had ever called normal to follow the call of the Gospel.

A man who lived all his life in a tent when most people lived in cities.

A woman who had a child when it was no longer even possible.

A man who sacrificed his dearest son for God.

A man who acknowledged his errors and submitted to God's way.

A man who took a lifetime but learned in the end to trust in God alone.

A man who never gave up on the assurance that one day God would take him home.

A couple who violated the laws of the land because of their trust in God.

A man who refused fame and prestige to follow Christ.

A man who stood up to the ruler of the world.

A man who trusted in the safety of the blood of God's providing.

A nation who had no option but to believe in Yahweh to save them.

A harlot and her household whom God saved – the only ones out of an entire city.

From these characters, and scores who followed in their footsteps, a legacy remains to our day. From the heights of the grandstand, those runners who finished their course having maintained the faith now cheer on those who continue the agonizing race of life. Their examples of faith and perseverance stand as monuments of inspiration to those still on the track. A man stands at the finish line. Upon his head is the laurel wreath of victory. In his hand is another wreath – a crown of righteousness – that he holds for every athlete who completes the race.

Until our Lord returns, or until we reach the finish line, we continue running towards him. He is the righteous Judge, but he's also run the race. He looks on in compassion. He wants us to reach the finish line. He asks but one thing: that like those witnesses who went before us, we turn away our eyes from everything else, and "*look unto Jesus*".