

Hebrews 11:1-16 Answers Commended By Faith

Review: This letter was written to Hebrew Christians who were being pressured to revert back to Judaism. The author wrote to remind them of the importance of who Christ is and what He accomplished on the cross.

Introduction: Based on 10:32-34, the Hebrews were suffering terrible persecution. They were being publicly reproached, imprisoned and having their property confiscated. It was critical for them to remain confident in the faith. **Read 10:23, 35, 36, 38-39, 40.** In each verse, the reason given for not giving up is because great reward awaited them.

KJV **1 Corinthians 2:9** Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him.

It all comes down to faith. Do you *really* believe?

Hebrews 11 contains example after example of people who had faith and who did not give up, but rather endured and were commended by God.

******According to Hebrews in 11:1-3, what is faith?** It is being sure that things you can't see or prove are real.

1. If you were to look up the word "faith" (11:1) in a regular English dictionary, what would it say that it means? It can mean 1.) confidence or trust in something thing (such as that a chair would support your weight) or 2.) belief that is not based on proof (it cannot be verified). This second meaning of faith is the hard one.

Joke: Art Linkletter, in a segment of his show called "Kids Say the Darnest Things", supposedly asked a young boy, "What is faith?" The boy replied, "Faith is believing something that you know isn't true!"

Word Study: The actual Greek word is *pistis* (4102) and simply means trust or confidence (BAGD p. 662). It is a conviction of the truthfulness of something (Thayer).

2. What does it mean to have "assurance" (11:1) of something? There are two ways of interpreting the Greek underneath the word "assurance". Having assurance is being sure of something. It is from *hupostasis* (5287) and is also used in **3:14** where it is translated "confidence". *Hupo* means "under" (as in hypodermic) and *stasis* means "to stand"; if something stands up under pressure it is a support or steady or rock solid.

However, BAGD's lexicon states that the sense of "confidence, assurance" must be eliminated since examples of it so used cannot be found! Instead, they suggest that it means "realization" or "reality" (BAGD, p. 847). Thus, "in faith things hoped for become realized" or "things hoped for become reality". This is also how it was translated by Tyndale and Luther. The Geneva Bible renders this, "Faith is what which causeth those things to appear in deed which are hoped for" (Bruce, p. 278). Notice also how well this understand of assurance meshes with the exhortations of **10:35, 36 & 39**.

Possibility: 11:1 may not be a definition of faith so much as it is a statement of the result of faith:

Keep your confidence and you'll have great reward (**10:35**).

Endure so that you'll receive what is promised (**10:36**).

Have faith and preserve your soul (**10:39**).

By faith the things hoped for will become reality; by faith you will prove that unseen things are real (**11:1**).

In faith things hoped for become reality. Heavenly realities exist whether you believe in them or not. The point is that you will only benefit from them if you believe that they exist.

Application of Definition #2: Only through faith would the Hebrews have the realization of the things they hoped for (in this context, forgiveness of sins).

3. What does it mean to "hope" (11:1) for something? See *Romans 8:24-25*. Whereas in normal English usage hope is wishful thinking, the Biblical idea of hope is a "confident expectation" (Thayer). "Hoped" is from the verb *elpizo* (1679) and means "to expect, foresee" (BAGD, p. 252). Biblically, it is an expectation of future blessings that are at present invisible (NBD, p. 489).

ESV Romans 8:24-25 . . . hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what he sees? . . . we hope for what we do not see . . .

4. Faith is said to be the conviction of things not seen. What is a conviction (11:1)? A conviction is something of which you are convinced. If you are convinced about something you have a conviction about it. The Greek is *elegchos* (1650), "a proof, that by which a thing is proved or tested" (Wuest, II, p. 193). Faith is a proving of (or conviction about) unseen things (BAGD, p. 249).

F.F. Bruce: "Physical eyesight produces conviction or evidence of physical things; faith is the organ which enables people . . . to see the invisible order" (p. 279).

ESV John 20:24-29 Thomas, one of the Twelve, called the Twin, was not with them when Jesus came. So the other disciples told him, "We have seen the Lord." But he said to them, "Unless I see in his hands the mark of the nails, and place my finger into the mark of the nails, and place my hand into his side, I will never believe." Eight days later, his disciples were inside again, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you." Then he said to Thomas, "Put

your finger here, and see my hands; and put out your hand, and place it in my side. Do not disbelieve, but believe." Thomas answered him, "My Lord and my God!" Jesus said to him, "Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed."

- 5. According to 11:2, how did the people of old get God's commendation?** They got it by faith. The implied application here is: *And so can you!* The rest of this chapter contains examples of people of old who were commended by God for their faith. They were people who had no visible evidence that God's promise would ever be fulfilled, yet they regulated the whole course of their lives in light of their faith in what God promised (Bruce, p. 277).
- 6. In 11:3, what example did the author give of unseen things becoming visible?** The universe, which we can now see, was created out of the invisible.

ESV **Psalm 33:6, 9** By the word of the LORD the heavens were made, and by the breath of his mouth all their host . . . he spoke, and it came to be; he commanded, and it stood firm.

ESV **Job 38:4** Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth?

Purpose: The author assumes that his readers are not evolutionists, but rather had taken it for granted that God created the universe out of nothing. This is a set up for what is coming next. Just as we all believe that God created the universe, so too the following people of old believed in God's promises and power.

Charismania: 11:3 should not be twisted to mean that God created the universe by faith. Rather, we take it by faith that God created the universe (since happened in the past and we were not there: one cannot recreate it in a laboratory). The idea is since you already have faith that God created the universe in the past, so too have faith in His present promises to us.

****** According to 11:4-7, what difference did faith make in the lives of Abel, Enoch, and Noah?** Faith enabled Abel's offering to be accepted, Enoch to never die and Noah build the ark to save his family.

— Abel —

Who were Cain and Abel? They were brothers, Adam and Eve's first two children, one of whom murdered the other.

Joke: *What did Cain kill his brother?* Because he was able.

- 7. Based on 11:4, what was the difference between Abel's offering and Cain's offering?** The difference was not in what was offered (animal or vegetable), but rather the faith in which Abel made his offering.

According to 11:4, God commended Abel in two different ways for his faith. What were the two ways? Because of Abel's faith, God commended him as righteous and God also commended Abel by accepting his gifts.

8. Why did the author point out the fact that Abel died (11:4)? Abel died due to his faith; his brother Cain was jealous. Able might be considered the first martyr. Abel's death is also in contrast to Enoch, who never died; both men had faith.

9. In what sense does Abel still speak, even though he is dead (11:4)? On the one hand, he speaks through the record of his life in the scriptures. On the other, he his shed blood still cries out for vindication:

ESV **Genesis 4:10** And the LORD said, "What have you done? The voice of your brother's blood is crying to me from the ground.

ESV **Hebrews 12:22-24** But you have come . . . to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel.

Can you hear Abel speaking (11:4)? What is he saying? He is saying that we should follow his example and live lives of faith.

Abel's Context: Consider also the unbelief surrounding Abel. His very own parents were Adam and Eve, the ones who had sinned in the Garden and his own brother clearly was not of faith.

— Enoch —

How did God bless Enoch for his faith (11:5)?

ESV **Genesis 5:24** Enoch walked with God, and he was not, for God took him.

10. What did God say about Enoch before He took him (11:5)? He was another person of old who was commended for his faith (11:2).

11. What is the point of 11:6? Anything that has to do with God must begin with faith. Without faith it is impossible to please God. It is an indispensable ingredient. Apart from faith, neither Abel nor Enoch could ever have pleased God.

According to 11:6, what is true of anyone who seeks God? He believes that God exists and that God will reward those who seek Him. Here is a clear case of one's belief determining one's behavior.

— Noah —

How did Noah's faith affect his behavior (11:7)? Despite the fact that there had never been a flood before, Noah built an ark in order to save his family when the flood did come (as promised by God). He had a "conviction of things not seen" (11:1).

12. How does Noah's example (11:7) serve as an illustration the definition of faith given in 11:1? Noah was persuaded that God's warning about events unseen was valid and in reverent fear built the ark to prepare for the coming deluge.

Based on 11:7, how did Noah obtain righteousness?

Soteriology: From Genesis to Revelation, righteousness has always and only come through faith.

Noah's Context: Noah kept his faith despite being surrounded by unbelief. No one in the whole world believed his warnings except his immediate family.

13. What application were the Hebrews supposed to derive from the examples of Abel, Enoch and Noah (11:4-7)? They were to hold fast to the confession of their hope without wavering (10:23); they were to not throw away their confidence (10:35); they were to endure in living out God's will (10:36); they were to live by faith (10:38-39).

— Abraham, Sarah, Isaac, Jacob —

******How did faith move both Abraham and his wife Sarah (11:8-12)?** Because he believed God's promise, Abraham left his home in Iraq to inherit a land that he had never seen (Canaan; modern Israel). Sarah believed God's promise that she would have children, even though she was not only barren but beyond the age of child bearing, and was given power to conceive.

14. How does Abraham (11:8-10) illustrate the definition of faith given in 11:1? Abraham was persuaded that God would lead him to an unknown land that he had never seen. When he left home, he did not know where he was going.

What unusual living conditions did the author point out in 11:9? Even after reaching the Promised Land, he lived there as if in a foreign country, in tents, as did Isaac and Jacob (his son and grandson).

15. Comparing 11:9 to 11:10, why did Abraham live in tents in the Promised Land? Abraham was looking for something far more significant than Middle Eastern real estate. He understood that the Promised Land was just a shadow, a type, a token of something much greater: spiritual reality. In fact, almost everything in the Old Testament is just a type of the reality that is in Christ and the new covenant.

The Big Three: God promised Abraham land, seed and blessing. All three had literal physical fulfillments. All three also have deeper, metaphysical fulfillments.

16. What city was foundations and has God as its designer and builder (11:10)? (*Hint: It is not earthly Jerusalem!*). See Revelation 3:12, 21:2. Abraham was looking for the New Jerusalem.

ESV Revelation 21:1ff I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God."

17. How does Sarah (11:11-12) illustrate the definition of faith given in 11:1? Sarah was persuaded that God would enable her to have children, even though her body had been unable to conceive all her life and even though she had reached menopause.

How does 11:11 support the definition of faith suggested by the lexicon of BAGD (in faith things hoped for become realized)? The text clearly states that she received the power to conceive because of her faith in God's promise.

ESV Matthew 13:58 (Jesus) did not do many mighty works there (Nazareth), because of their unbelief.

Note: The Greek underlying 11:11 is unclear as to whether Abraham or Sarah is the one who had the faith unto conception.

18. Why is the author giving us the information contained in 11:12? It shows the great results of faith in God! There was a greatly multiplied return (not just one child but a whole nation)!

ESV Genesis 22:17 I will surely bless you, and I will surely multiply your offspring as the stars of heaven and as the sand that is on the seashore.

Spiritual Reality: The promise of physical descendants was a type of the ultimate fulfillment of the promise (in spiritual descendants):

ESV Galatians 3:7 . . . it is those of faith who are the sons of Abraham.

ESV Galatians 3:29 . . . if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise.

19. What lesson were the Hebrews supposed to derive from the examples of Abraham and Sarah (11:8-12)? They were to hold fast to the confession of their hope without wavering (10:23); they were to not throw away their confidence (10:35); they were to endure in living out God's will (10:36); they were to live by faith (10:38-39).

******Why is God not ashamed to be called their God (11:13-16)?** It is because they continued on in faith all their lives, even if they died before obtaining the promise, 11:13a.

20. Which of God's promises did Abraham, Sarah, Isaac and Jacob not live to see fulfilled (11:13)? All four of them lived like strangers in the Promised Land. Abraham and Sarah lived to see their son Isaac born, but did not live to see their descendants become as numerous as the sand and stars. Neither did Isaac and Jacob.

21. How is 11:13 consistent with the definition of faith in 11:1? They were persuaded that God's promises were true even though they never lived to see the things promised.

According to 11:13, what did all these people acknowledge? They acknowledged that they were strangers and exiles on earth.

Evidently at least some of the Hebrew Christians had this same attitude, which enabled them to have "joyfully accepted the plundering of your property, since you knew that you yourselves had a better possession and an abiding one" (ESV **Hebrews 10:34**).

22. Comparing 11:13 back to 11:9, what did Abraham do that showed he considered himself to be a stranger and exile on earth? He lived in tents the rest of his life.

23. Based on 11:14-16 what were these people really looking for? (Reread aloud). They were seeking a heavenly country. Just as the tabernacle was a copy of heavenly reality, so too the Promised Land, that Middle Eastern real estate, was only a type, only a shadow, only a picture of the true, the real, the actual heavenly country.

ESV 2 Peter 3:13 . . . according to his promise we are waiting for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells.

According to 11:16, what else has God prepared for these people? *Compare 11:10.* God has prepared a city for them. This is the city with foundations that Abraham was looking for, 11:10.

Note: Sometimes heaven is compared to a country and sometimes to a city.

So What?

What is faith? 11:1.

Even back in Old Testament days, what made people commendable to God? 11:2, 7.

ESV Genesis 15:6 . . . he believed the LORD, and he counted it to him as righteousness.

How does Hebrews 11 relate back to Hebrews 10? The historical examples of Hebrews 11 serve as incentives to obey the exhortation of 10:19-39.

24. What application does Hebrews 11 hold for us today?

25. What interesting insight does Hebrews 11 give us about the true significance of Old Testament promises? Compare 10:1. The physical promises of the Old Testament (such as the Promised Land) were merely intermediate. They were shadows of the reality that came in Christ, 10:1.

26. Hebrews 11 makes it very clear that Abraham had very little interest in the physical Promised Land. If Abraham was not greatly interested in it, how interested should you be? See Hebrews 13:11-14.

Though we don't have the time to go into it, each of the "big three" promises of the Abrahamic covenant (land, seed, blessing) had at least two fulfillments:

- an immediate and then an ultimate,
- the physical and then the metaphysical,
- the foreshadow and then the reality,
- the type and then the fulfillment of the type,
- a temporary and then an eternal,
- an outward and then an inner,
- the sign and then the substance to which the sign pointed,
- the interim and then the permanent.

What attitude did the New Testament writers express toward the earthly Jerusalem?

See Galatians 4:21-31, Revelation 11:7-8, 18:10. Galatians compares the earthly Jerusalem to the fleshly Hagar and the slavery of the Law. Revelation refers to Jerusalem as Sodom and Egypt. Hebrews urges its readers to not be associated with Jerusalem, 13:11-14.

Summary: The Land foreshadowed a heavenly country, the new Jerusalem. The multitude of children foreshadowed all those who would have the faith of Abraham. According to **Galatians 3:7-9**, the fulfillment of the blessing promise is the gift of justification by faith.

**** = ask this question before reading the text aloud. This is put people's minds in gear and them something to look for as the text is read. It causes focus.

These Hebrews lessons are designed for a 45 minute session.

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