

Mid Week • Hebrews 11

INTRODUCTION

The more we study the Bible, the more we tend to think of it as being divided into chapters and verses because they are so prominently displayed in all our translations.

When we go to church or our small group, the leader will say, “Turn to Malachi 3:10” or “Matthew 15:12.”

We tend to think of the Bible as a collection of verses organized in segments called chapters.

But the chapter and verse divisions were added long after the text was originally penned.

When the Apostle Paul wrote Ephesians, he didn't say to himself, “Okay, that's enough for the first chapter, I'll start the second chapter here.”

Consequently, when we read & study the bible, we can lose the sense of continuity because when we come to the end of a chapter we tend to think that means the end of something.

This isn't always the case, as is so with chapter 10 & 11 of Hebrews.

While the bulk of chapter 10 is concerned with reinforcing the idea of the supremacy of Jesus Christ as our Great High Priest, the chapter ends with a stirring exhortation to cleave to Him and press on into a deeper experience of His presence in our lives.

As the chapter closes out, the writer reminds his readers that our relationship with God is an issue of faith – about holding fast to God on the basis of His word and promise – and not on the basis of present circumstances.

This truth then moves him to launch into a long section of reminding them of all their heroes, who were heroic *for the very reason* that they maintained their faith in God **DESPITE** their circumstances.

A young boy who aspires to be a pro-basketball player puts poster of Michael Jordan on his wall.

A young girl who aspires to be an Olympic gymnast puts up posters of Mary Lou Renton.

Aspiring rock and rollers stick up posters of their favorite bands.

In Chapter 11, the writer puts up verbal posters of the pillars of the Jewish faith and encourages his readers to aspire to their example. He begins with a simple definition of what faith is . . .

CHAPTER 11

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

That one verse has enough *truth* in it, enough *theological insight* to occupy our attention for weeks!

In fact, countless sermons have been preached on this.

In a nutshell, what the author is saying is that faith, *genuine biblical faith*, is a *reasoned response* to the revelation of God.

It is our apprehension of what God has said and our personal application of it to our lives today.

A good analogy to grasp what the author is saying here is this – Faith is our “sense” of the Spirit.

We have 5 natural or bodily senses –

- Sight
- Sound
- Touch
- Smell
- Taste

Through these senses we perceived and interact with the physical universe.

Think about how the senses work; take for instance, *sight*.

We see that guitar – there it is.

But what is really taking place in us that allows us to SEE the guitar?

The light is reflecting off the guitar and entering our eyeball.

The image is inverted and focused onto the back of our retina via the lens.

The various colors and shades cause chemical reactions to take place in the rods and cones that are translated into electrical stimuli that is then transferred via the optic nerve to the rear of our brains where the signals are translated into something that looks like that.

But what is that?

That information is then sent over to the language center of our brain where there is a quick search done on objects until one fits and the label “guitar” is attached to it.

All of this takes place *virtually instantaneously* so that we are unaware of the process.

But make no mistake, the process *is* going on.

The point is this – that guitar is an *objective reality*, whether or not any of us ever see it – but how it becomes real TO US, is via our senses.

And really, our perception of it, is something that takes place where? IN US, in our brains.

Faith is the sense of the spirit.

It is our perception of the *spiritual* realm, which by its very nature *transcends* the physical realm.

Physical senses are not capable of perceiving the spiritual realm – just as they are not capable of perceiving some parts of the physical realm.

There are certain wavelengths of light the eye cannot see – like ultraviolet and infrared.

There are certain sounds the ear cannot hear – above 20,000 hertz and below 20 hertz.

Just as our eyes need light to see and our ears need sound to hear, faith, the sense of the spirit, needs spiritual light and sound in order to be active.

Spiritual light and sound come through the revelation of God – His Word.

When He speaks, our spirit is illuminated

And just as we perceive the guitar via our eye, we perceive the reality of the spiritual realm via faith.

Because our eyes see the guitar, we can *interact* with it. We go over and pick it up and put it to use.

In the same way, faith allows us to interact with the reality of the spiritual realm.

And that is what the author means when he says that . . .

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

Faith allows us to not only *perceive* spiritual reality but to *interact* with it.

Just as our physical senses permit us to have meaningful interaction with the physical realm.

Imagine what it would be like if a young child grew up among a people who all her life, told her that that [the guitar] was an elephant.

They carefully arranged to make sure that it was never played as a musical instrument, but instead was kept in a zoo.

In other words, they attached a different *label* to it and kept telling her stories about it that were consistent with it being an elephant.

In her mind, every time she saw that, she would think of it as what? An elephant.

Question – would it be an elephant?

No – it's a guitar. Her perception of it is faulty because she's been deceived.

This is the way it is regarding spiritual perception and reality.

Until we're born again by the Spirit of God, our own fallen nature and the world system around us which has been cleverly designed by the devil to keep us in spiritual darkness, have redefined spiritual truth and attached deceptive labels to things like God, Faith, Love, Holiness, Sin; -- You name it!

Jesus said satan was a liar and the father of lies and that the entire world system lies under his influence & control.

In order for a person to be born again, the Spirit of God must open their eyes to see the truth about their spiritual condition and the remedy that's to be found in Christ alone.

The potential for faith is made possible through the Word of God – they come face to face with spiritual reality – like a person whose been sitting in a dark room, and the door opens a crack to allow a beam of light to enter and illuminate them.

If they respond and move toward that light, then they are born again.

And they begin a life-long process of the renewing of their mind in which the lies the world, the flesh, and the devil taught them are undone and *new labels* are given to them.

2For by it [meaning 'faith'] the elders obtained a good testimony.

By “elders” the writer means those they held in high esteem.

Faith, spiritual sense, is what *enabled* the elders to rise to the place of such high esteem.

3By faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that the things which are seen were not made of things which are visible.

As the author now launches into a long section charting the examples of faith from the dawn of creation up to the present day, he starts at the beginning.

How do we **KNOW** that God created all things?

We know it by faith!

But is this faith a blind leap in the dark?

Is this faith the kind of thing that so many skeptics today consider faith to be - believing in things you *know* aren't really true?

Look careful at what the author is saying here.

He's saying that faith is a **REASONED RESPONSE TO THE EVIDENCE AT HAND**.

You see, no one was there at the beginning except God.

In fact, *reason* **demands** that God Himself is eternal and all-powerful.

Romans 1:20 states this emphatically!

Logic requires us to concede that there's an all-powerful and self-existing deity who owns His own existence.

So, although there was no one there taking pictures of creation, we can conclude that God created all things.

Visible things were created out of a prior, *invisible* dimension.

We believe God created all things because it is the **ONLY** reasonable and logically consistent position to take.

This might be a good time for us to go into the ontological argument for the existence of God but that would take us on a tangent that would prohibit us from finishing the chapter tonight.

Let me sum up the whole thing this way – no matter what model of origins you believe in, you face the problem of an infinite

regression.

It's the old child's question – "Where did that come from?"

[Do it – to "Where did God come from?"]

God, by His very nature – has no beginning – if He did, then He would owe his existence to something prior and *that would be God.*

Logic demands something that owes it's own existence – and so by it's very definition stands above and prior to creation.

To believe this is not a blind leap in the dark.

To believe this – to have faith in God as Creator, is the only reasonable thing to do.

As Bible believing Christians, we must not allow skeptics to redefine faith as divorced from reason.

They do this today.

In their attempt to separate religion from philosophy and then co-opt the life of the mind, they have defend faith as a belief gained apart from evidence.

They draw a bold line between faith and reason and make faith illogical!

We must resist this movement and respond with a solid conviction that the Christian faith, Biblical faith, as it is described so clearly here - is a reasoned response to the evidence.

Now the author is going to give several examples of faith in the lives of the elders, the heroes of scripture . . .

⁴By faith Abel offered to God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, through which he obtained witness that he was righteous, God testifying of his gifts; and through it he being dead still speaks.

Each of the vignettes given here could occupy our attention for an entire Bible study because what we find here is an analysis of the life of each of these people in light of their faith in God.

In Genesis we read how both Cain and Abel, the first and second sons of Adam & Eve brought an offering to the Lord.

Abel brought his with faith while Cain brought his for some other reason.

God demonstrated His acceptance of Abel's offering, probably

by sending fire from heaven to consume it, while Cain's offering just sat there unaccepted.

Cain grew jealous of his brother and killed him.

The murder proved Cain's heart was wrong to begin with. In Abel's treatment at the hands of his brother, we see the model of how the *merely* religious hate those who are genuine believers in God.

What God is looking for is faith, and what is offer in faith He accepts.

The merely religious are into works – and when they see the favor of God poured out on faith, it makes them angry.

This is precisely the kind of hatred and opposition the readers of this letter were facing from their Jewish brethren.

They were Abel being opposed by Cain.

5By faith Enoch was taken away so that he did not see death, “and was not found, because God had taken him”; for before he was taken he had this testimony, that he pleased God.

Enoch was a man who lived in such vibrant faith in God that He didn't die – God simply translated him to heaven.

I like the way one person tells Enoch's story.

Genesis tells us that Enoch walked with God – and it happened this way.

One day, Enoch and God were walking and talking and one day as they walked and talked it got to be so late that God said, “Oh, look – we've come so far together we're closer to My house than yours. Why don't you just come home with Me tonight?”

Enoch's example of being pleasing to the Lord because of faith moves the author to say this . . .

6But without faith *it is* impossible to please *Him*, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and *that* He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him.

This is my text for this Sunday, so I will leave it till then.

7By faith Noah, being divinely warned of things not yet seen, moved with godly fear, prepared an ark for the saving of his household, by which he condemned the

world and became heir of the righteousness which is according to faith.

How did Noah find out about the coming flood?

God told him!

And he counted God's word as sufficient proof that he would spend the next 100 years building the ark – a massive project that was accompanied the entire time by the hostile opposition of his neighbors.

Note how the writer introduces 2 important truths about genuine faith here.

1) Faith in God **MOVED** Noah to do something.

What proves our belief is *genuine biblical faith* is that it moves us to a response corresponding to what we say we believe.

There are a lot of people today who *say* they believe in God, but their lifestyle is *inconsistent* with that profession.

We know there are people who claim to be Christians, but again, their lifestyle is inconsistent with the character of Christ.

Genuine faith produces a lifestyle that is generally consistent with the Word of God.

Noah's faith in God moved him to build an ark.

2) Faith in God, even faith that lays hold of God for a specific issue, is the ground upon which He moves to impute His righteousness.

Look at what the end of v. 7 says . . .

. . . and became heir of the righteousness which is according to faith.

Noah's response to God's command to build the ark resulted ultimately in Noah's salvation.

God told Abraham that his descendants would be as numerous as the sand and the stars; when Abraham believed that promise, God counted it to him as righteousness.

The point is this – when a person's faith in God becomes a heart-felt and personal response to *Him*, this is the basis upon which He works to bring them to a complete faith in Him and His redemption.

Now the author turns to the preeminent example of faith – Abraham.

8By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to the place which he would receive as an inheritance. And he went out, not knowing where he was going. 9By faith he dwelt in the land of promise as *in* a foreign country, dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise; 10for he waited for the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker *is* God.

Though God promised Abraham the entire land of Canaan, the only thing Abraham ever really owned was a small plot of land that he used as a burial ground for his family.

Still, he lived in the land with confidence that it would one day be his through His descendants.

He waited on the timing and providence of God to make it his.

V. 10 indicates that during Abraham's entire life, the real land he looked forward to wasn't earthly – it was heaven!

The life he lived on earth was only temporary and in anticipation for an eternal destiny.

Abraham was a nomadic shepherd who lived his entire life in tents, roaming from place to place.

He wouldn't cease from his nomadic lifestyle till he entered the glory and rest of heaven.

11By faith Sarah herself also received strength to conceive seed, and she bore a child when she was past the age, because she judged Him faithful who had promised.

12Therefore from one man, and him as good as dead, were born *as many* as the stars of the sky in multitude—*innumerable* as the sand which is by the seashore.

What's interesting about this commentary is that as we read the story of Sarah in Genesis, we don't see too much evidence of faith.

What we see is her doubt.

When the Lord told Abraham that Sarah would conceive and have a son, she overheard the conversation and snickered because both she and Abe were well past the age of bearing children!

God caught her snicker and said that the child would be named "Laughter – Isaac" because of it.

It must be at that point, Sarah's doubt turned to faith.

13These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off were assured of them, embraced *them* and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth. **14**For those who say such things declare plainly that they seek a homeland. **15**And truly if they had called to mind that *country* from which they had come out, they would have had opportunity to return. **16**But now they desire a better, that is, a heavenly *country*. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for He has prepared a city for them.

Here the writer makes it plain that ultimately faith in God lifts us out of living a life that is identified solely with this world.

While many of God's promises are meant to be appropriated and lived out in the here and now, the life of faith aims not at this world or even this life, but at the world and life to come.

When Abel, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, and Sarah took their first steps on the road of faith in God, then embarked on a journey whose final destination is the glory of heaven.

The more they traveled that road, the more they yearned for the end of the journey.

This is something most of us can identify with.

When we first came to faith in Christ it was because we realized our desperate condition and that apart from His salvation we were doomed.

We saw Jesus at first as Savior- Rescuer!

But as we've gone on in the faith and learned to walk in faith, He's become more than that.

Now we embrace Him as Lord and Master.

He's become a precious Friend.

And the Chief Desire of our hearts.

Many of us have come to the point this evening of being like an excited bride on the even of her wedding.

We can't wait for the night to be over and the dawn of our wedding day to come so we can see our Heavenly Lover face to face and feel His embrace.

This kind of mindset, the mindset of faith, moves us to identify with heaven far more than earth, and so we end up feeling like strangers

here, pilgrims who are merely passing through on our journey to our real home – heaven.

17 By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac, and he who had received the promises offered up his only begotten son, ¹⁸of whom it was said, “*In Isaac your seed shall be called,*” ¹⁹concluding that God was able to raise *him* up, even from the dead, from which he also received him in a figurative sense.

The writer returns to the story of Abraham and that time of testing in which God commanded him to do something which seemed totally contrary to the nature and character of God; to offer up Isaac as an sacrifice.

The point the author is making is that in the process of time, Abraham’s faith *grew* to the point where based purely on the Word of God, apart from what seemed reasonable to the mind of man, he was willing do obey God.

Earlier I said that faith is a reasonable response to the evidence at hand.

As faith matures, it comes to the point of confident abandonment onto God without reservation.

Mature Faith rests in the knowledge that God is good *despite* the apparent evidence.

Even when God asks me to do something that seems *contrary* to reason, I will conclude that my reasons is what falls short, not God.

Abraham did that with the command to offer Isaac.

He reasoned thus:

- 1) God has promised to make my descendants through Isaac as numerous as the sand and stars.
- 2) Isaac has no children as of yet.
- 3) God has commanded me to offer Isaac as a sacrifice.
- 4) Okay: this concerns me for 2 reasons
 - #1 – God prohibits murder
 - #2 – If Isaac dies, he can’t have any kids and the promise of God falls apart.
- 5) Therefore, there is more going on here than I can understand.
- 6) BUT – I *know* that God can do anything and

7) I *know* He has told me, very clearly, I am to offer Isaac. So Abraham moved forward to obey God – and we know what happened.

God stayed his hand as the blade was plunging toward Isaac's breast.

It is always safest to obey God's clear command, even when obedience seems contrary to the circumstances or evidence.

The writer now gives a whole litany of various examples of faith in the lives of the elders . . .

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

21 By faith Jacob, when he was dying, blessed each of the sons of Joseph, and worshiped, *leaning* on the top of his staff.

22 By faith Joseph, when he was dying, made mention of the departure of the children of Israel, and gave instructions concerning his bones.

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

24 By faith Moses, when he became of age, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, ²⁵choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin, ²⁶esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt; for he looked to the reward.

The writer mentions *Christ* here and says that Moses chose to identify with Christ rather than the world.

As we read the story in Exodus, we find no mention of the Messiah, so what does he mean.

The writer once more shows how the life of faith, engaged even by

the OT saints, put them on the path toward Christ.

In whatever way a person opens up in genuine faith to the true God, God uses that as the avenue by which to fully disclose His redemptive plan through His Son.

27 By faith he [Moses] forsook Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king; for he endured as seeing Him who is invisible. **28** By faith he kept the Passover and the sprinkling of blood, lest he who destroyed the firstborn should touch them.

29 By faith they passed through the Red Sea as by dry *land*, whereas the Egyptians, attempting *to do so*, were drowned.

30 By faith the walls of Jericho fell down after they were encircled for seven days. **31** By faith the harlot Rahab did not perish with those who did not believe, when she had received the spies with peace.

All of these examples, from v. 20 on all speak of people who simply took God at His word and based their lives on it.

32 And what more shall I say? For the time would fail me to tell of Gideon and Barak and Samson and Jephthah,

These were judges of Israel.

also of David and Samuel and the prophets: **33** who through faith subdued kingdoms, worked righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, **34** quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness were made strong, became valiant in battle, turned to flight the armies of the aliens. **35** Women received their dead raised to life again.

The faith of all these was tried and came out victorious in that it accomplished great wonders and miracles.

But not all faith leads to such *encouraging* results and ends.

Sometimes, genuine faith is proven even more powerfully in that the result seems like defeat-

Others were tortured, not accepting deliverance, that they might obtain a better resurrection. ³⁶Still others had trial of mockings and scourgings, yes, and of chains and imprisonment. ³⁷They were stoned, they were sawn in two, were tempted, were slain with the sword. They wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins, being destitute, afflicted, tormented—³⁸of whom the world was not worthy. They wandered in deserts and mountains, *in dens and caves of the earth.*

You see, in vs. 32 through half of v. 35, faith overcame the obstacles to assert *deliverance* in this world.

But in vs. 35 through 38, faith overcame the obstacles, only to be revealed in heaven.

The author's point was that in this world we shall know trouble and the trying of our faith.

Our task is to remain faithful and leave the ends up to God.

Jesus said it this way – “In the world you shall have tribulation, but be of good cheer, for I have overcome the world.” [John 16:33]

³⁹And all these, having obtained a good testimony through faith, did not receive the promise, ⁴⁰God having provided something better for us, that they should not be made perfect apart from us.

This is where he brings it all together – and as he does he makes a *stupendous* comment.

The elders he mentioned at the outset, he's gone on to describe and show what it was that made them standouts.

What made them standouts was their faith in God.

And as heroic as they all were, from Abel right down to prophets like Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Zechariah – their faith was *incomplete*

because they waited for the full revelation of God in Jesus Christ.

That revelation had now been made and the ones who read this letter were the *first generation* to receive the *fulfillment* of that promise.

Now that Christ had come, all those heroes of faith, could enter in for the *first time* to all that their faith in God had anticipated.

What the writer says in these last 2 verses might be illustrated this way . . .

As good a golfer as Tiger Woods is, all his rounds of golf have never really been golf, until you come along and play a round and show him how to play golf.

As good a composer as Mozart was, he never really heard music until you came along and composed and performed.

As good an artist as Rembrandt was, he never really knew what a painting was till you came along and showed him.

All these seem like grossly improper things to say for Woods, Mozart and Rembrandt are all understood as being standouts in their field. To suppose that they didn't really know their stuff till we came along is absurd.

But that is what the author is saying here as it relates to faith.

You see, the faith of Abraham and Moses, the faith of Enoch and Abel, the faith of Isaiah and Jeremiah, as sterling and exceptional as it was, was only *partial* and *incomplete* because they were not given the full revelation of God in the Person of Jesus Christ.

You and I *have* been given that revelation – and as a result, we have the *potential* to live on a level of excellence that far surpasses that of Moses and Abraham!

Remember what the writer said at the very beginning of this letter?

¹God, who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, ²has in these last days spoken to us by *His Son*, whom He has appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the worlds;

CONCLUSION

God said to Enoch – “walk with me” and he did.

God said to Noah – “Build an ark” – and he spent 100 years at the task.

God said to Abraham – “Move” – and he packed up and left.

God said to Moses – “Lead My people out of bondage” – and he did.

God says to us – “Live! Live in faith in My Son.”

In the plan and purpose of God – what we, as the followers of

Christ do in faith *surpasses* what the OT saints did!
Get a vision for what faith means in your life and home.
Get a vision for your marriage, for your role as a husband or a wife.
Get a vision for your role as a parent.
Get a vision for your role as a student or a teacher.
Get a vision for what it means to believe God in your specific circumstance.

This chapter was written to encourage everyday believers like you and I that the faith we are called to is the consummation and realization of all that the heroes of the Bible yearned for.
If they could hold on to God with the partial revelation they had – how much more can we with the consummate revelation of Christ?
If they could rise above their circumstances to overcome the trials of the world, how much more can we?
If they could accomplish so much for the glory of God, what's stopping us from totally blowing the lid off this world and going for it with God?
Nothing – Nothing's stopping us but a lack of faith.