

The Epistle to the Hebrews

Lesson # 32 October 27, 2019

Faith Exhibited in Pre-Patriarchal Redemptive History

Hebrews 11: 2 - 5

By Faith

v. 2

Hebrews 10:36-39 forms the perfect transition into chapter 11, as it draws on Hab. 2:4 – *“My righteous one [or the just] shall live by faith.”* – in order to show us what the source of lifelong endurance & perseverance really is, and to invest in us that thing which keeps us from shrinking back from Christ, thus preserving our souls.

In our last lesson, as we examined Hebrews 11:1, we saw that the sole source of faith is God, and so He is the One who both supplies and underwrites our faith and directs our paths as believers. Now, as we launch off into chapter 11 and the numerous specific examples of those who lived by their faith, we begin to see the application of verse 1. “By faith” appears some 18 times in chapter 11, and the juxtaposition of it in the text acts as a hammer hitting a nail, repeatedly driving home the truth more and more. In Romans 15:4 and I Cor. 10:6, Paul uses a parallel theme to instruct NT believers to heed what the OT records about the way people lived their lives and what the outcome of their actions was. The A.H. also uses a similar point in Heb. 3:12-19, expressing it negatively, but effectively, showing the readers how not to live in relation to God.

Notice here in Hebrews 11 how the author expresses his introductory remark as he comments in v. 2 on the extremely critical v. 1. The *“by it”* refers of course to “faith”. And “by it”, people received “their commendation – or ‘praise’. IOW, by it they pleased God. We will examine this further in verse 6. Receiving a military medal is often called receiving a commendation, so it is like a reward for a job well done. In Hebrews 12:1, those we are about to read about in chapter 11 are called *“so great a cloud of witnesses”*. So, in chapter 11, we see faith operating in people’s lives in ways that should inspire us to *“run with endurance the race that is set before us.”* (Heb. 12:1)

The Visible Out of the Invisible - Creation

v. 3

This first example of “by faith” does not refer to the actions of a specific person of faith, but to our reaction to the biblical record of how we are to understand everything we observe visibly and with all of our biological senses in the world and universe around us. It is our worldview as believers that is in sight in this verse.

As we understand and sometimes wither under the assault of the theories of ‘scientists’ and their secular followers, the created order cannot be explained by evidence that is available to our physical senses. Creation is a one-time event which no human witnessed (cf. Job 38:4-11). Only God was there and at least partway

through, the created angels were able to observe it and be amazed by what they saw. So, without faith, we can't even begin to explain the world we now exist in. Ravi Zacharias point out something helpful here; "We have, then, an "ontologically haunted" universe – an uncaused reality that exists which is unlike any other physical reality that we know. This has to be something more than physical. There has to be something more than physical or "natural", something quite different in character from which or from whom this physical universe derives its existence. Clearly this at least provides for the possibility of God, giving a "spiritual" uncaused entity some 'breathing room'. A strictly physical or natural explanation is not provable by the laws that govern a physical or natural universe. In short, the tests of nature for nature establish that naturalism as a first cause is indefensible. Something beyond a physical reality is needed to explain this universe."¹

Ravi Zacharias is very capable theologian, apologist and philosopher – a logical thinker, and a prolific writer. I would recommend anything he has written. The book this quote comes from is called, "Can Man Live Without God?", and it is well worth reading.

But really, as good as such quotes are, the Bible itself makes a clear and matter-of-fact case for this same point in places like Genesis 1, and the passage in Job already cited, but Job 38-39 is an amazing commentary by God Himself of the (humanly speaking) unfathomable nature of God's creative work. Also see Romans 1:18-32 as Paul shares the reason for God's wrath. The underlying basis for man's sin (obviously Adam and Eve and the Fall) is the continued dependence of man in "suppressing the [obvious] truth in unrighteousness". This is because, as dead spiritually as man is, he can still reason and his reason brings him to realise (and then, to suppress – Rom. 1:18) that the account of creation is true (and its effects cannot just be wished away), then there is a Creator – a God whom we must contend with, and because of our sin and rebellion against Him, he is angry! – cf. Heb. 10:31 and Psalm 33:6-9. Other passages to examine on your own are: John 1:1-3; Heb. 1:1-3; Col. 1:15-17; Romans 11:33-36; Isa. 40:25-28; 42:5; 44:23-24; 45:12,18; 48:14; 51:12-16.

Faith is not a blind leap to grasp a truth that holds out hope for us. It is based on God's Word which tells us that He made all things, and that Christ upholds them by the Word of His power (Col. 1:17) (note also Heb. 1:3; Isaiah 55:8-11), and His words fulfill His purposes. God comments on His creation power again in Isaiah 44:24; 45:12,18 & 48:12-13.

Abel: The World's First Murder Victim v. 4

Let's read the account in Genesis 4:1-10.

Notice that, in the Genesis account, no mention is made of Abel's faith, which Hebrews 11:4 says is what prompted him to offer his sacrifice to God.

¹ Ravi Zacharias, cited in Richard Phillips, Hebrews, p. 396

But what was it about the sacrifice of Abel versus the sacrifice of Cain that exhibited his faith and thus pleased God? There are at least two ways to look at this. The first is to see Abel as a man of faith and Cain as a man without faith. This was, in fact, Calvin's view. "The sacrifice of Abel was more acceptable to that of his brother only because it was sanctified by faith...Where did His pleasing come from other than that he had a heart purified by faith?"² Logically, this view says, "God receives the man of faith, and therefore his offering, rejecting the man who lacks faith."³ Even Paul, in Romans 14:23 expressed this same concept.

But this first view does not sufficiently explain Genesis 4:1-10, because the text emphasises the difference between the two offerings, not just the differences between the two brothers. It wasn't that they both brought identical offerings, and one was received by faith and the other was rejected as a result unbelief. No – the offerings were different, and it is in that contrast that we see one's faith and the other's unbelief. So what difference between the two offerings resulted in this distinction in God's reaction?

We see a hint in how Adam and Eve tried to deal with their sinful guilt in Gen. 3:7, and how God effectively dealt with it in Gen. 3:21. A blood sacrifice was required (even at that early stage, establishing substitutionary atonement) to atone for sin. If we are going to comprehend the atoning substitutionary sacrifice of Jesus Christ for our sins ages later, then this event, which fundamentally establishes God's only acceptable remedy for sin – the blood of an innocent substitute, must reveal a process which God early on indicates as the only way to cleanse from sin. This is connected indelibly to Christ and His cross-work in many places, but in I Peter 1:17b-21, it is made very clear. (& cf. Heb. 1:1-2)

George Whitefield comments'

"What were the coats that God made to put on our first parents, but types of the applications of the merits of the righteousness of Jesus Christ to believers' hearts? We are told that these coats were made of skins of beasts...Those beasts were slain in sacrifice, in commemoration of the great sacrifice, Jesus Christ, thereafter to be offered. And the skins of the beasts thus slain, being put on Adam and Eve, they were hereby taught how their nakedness was to be covered with the righteousness of the lamb of God."⁴

God, in this primary act of dealing with the first sin, was revealing the means whereby sinful man could approach a holy God. Is this not just what the A.H. has been fleshing out for us especially over the last 4 chapters of Hebrews? What is the only acceptable way prescribed by God Himself, to sacrifice to bring Him an expression of faith? There is only one way – by grace through faith in Jesus Christ!

² John Calvin, Cited by Richard Phillips in Hebrews, p. 402

³ IBID, p. 402

⁴ George Whitefield, cited in Richard Phillips, Hebrews, p. 403-404

So what was wrong with Cain's (probably heart-felt) offering? It did not involve the shedding of blood! "By faith Abel's sacrifice was better than Cain's, not just because Abel's faith made it better, but because, by faith, he offered the sacrifice that God had established as the means by which He would accept sinful mankind!"⁵ Notice God's rebuke to Cain in Genesis 4:6-7, which bears this interpretation out. Although not specifically recorded for us, these 2 men (boys?) had somewhere been taught what God expected and accepted as viable worship.

What is the underlying lesson of Genesis 4 then, and how does it relate to the theme of chapter 11? You must not think that you can come to God anyway that suits you. If you say you are a believer, but that you can decide for yourself how you can draw near to Him, ignoring what He has prescribed, then you are duplicating Cain's error. There are only two kinds of offerings – two ways to approach God – one way is to count on our own works, merits, righteousness; and the other is to have faith in Jesus Christ and His work on the Cross, crucified in our place as a sinless substitute to pay for our sins. Romans 10:1-4 and Hebrews 4:14-16 make this clear. The only acceptable approach to God is through faith in the shed blood of Christ.

Verse 4c finishes the A.H.'s thoughts on Abel by saying, "And through his faith, though he died, he still speaks." Notice too Gen. 4:10. There are a couple of important points here; (1) Abel's faith did not save him from physical death, and (2) He still speaks – which is a reference to his story which still carries the weight of exhortation for those who hear it, and it is also possible that it refers to his life now in the spiritual realm, now awaiting the resurrection of the just, or it could refer to both. Note the A.H.'s comment in Heb. 12:24 and then Revelation 14:13.

Supported by Heb. 11:6, Cain knew God existed, and that He rewards those who seek Him; thus, Cain's failure to please God means that he did what he did apart from faith. The fact that only Abel's offering was acceptable to God, and God commended him for it, means that God's wrath (the appeasing of which is the reason for any sacrifice to begin with) was turned away by the blood. This blood sacrifice, Hebrews 10:4 notwithstanding, spoke of the coming (yet many centuries away from Abel's life and death) cross of Christ, and it was on that basis that God accepted Abel's sacrifice and not Cain's. Cain's sacrifice could not be acceptable, as it did not honour God's prescribed way of presenting an offering – and surely, both men would have known this – perhaps by Adam and Eve's (unrecorded) worship after the Fall from outside of Eden. If they both knew how God wanted it done, but Cain refused to heed it, hence the conflict that resulted in Abel's murder – cf. Genesis 4:5-7.

The faith of Abel still bears testimony, all the way to us here in 2019, of the value of faith, of its worth, of its power to justify all those who trust in Christ, and of the fact, that true faith can create persecution from those who do not possess it. "Though he died..." many faithful martyrs die, even in modern times at an astonishing rate at the

⁵ Phillips, Hebrews, p. 404

hands of those who hate God, but faith is never silenced. God keeps the testimony of His faithful servants alive for all eternity. Cf. Rev. 6:9-11.

Richard Phillips comments;

“What a wonder it was to the guardian cherubim [at the entrance to Eden] when Abel by his sacrifice of faith was accepted and approved of God.

The same must have happened when Abel was killed; the first man to die, but also the first to appear in heaven. What an event that must have been! For the first time a sinner appeared in the holy courts of glory, cleansed and clothed in the righteousness of God’s Son. How the angels must have marveled at this mystery of grace! G. Campbell Morgan writes;

“It was a great occasion when this first soul representing a fallen race appeared in the unsullied light of the unfallen. He came by faith, ransomed by love, at the cost of sacrifice. As the Scripture declares that the “angels desire to look into” these things [I Pet. 1:12], this must indeed have been a mystery of life and love demanding their close attention, and not perchance, even fathomed by them, until the explanation...was wrought upon the cross of Calvary.”

Before the time of Jesus Christ, Abel – though dead – spoke of a sacrifice yet to come that would take away our sin, and of faith in the sacrifice that declares the sinner righteous. Now that Christ has come, Abel speaks of it still, with a voice that fully rejoices.”⁶

Enoch – One Who Walked With God

v. 5

See Genesis 5:21-24; Jude 14-16

An interesting transition takes place as Genesis 4 rolls into Genesis 5. From Genesis 1-4, it is noticeable that, apart from the list and detail of the days of creation, no age of anyone is ever given. For example, at what apparent age were Adam and Eve when they were created? How old were Cain and Abel when the murder of Abel occurred? Our only clue is that Cain sought out a wife immediately after God sent him away, so we can be certain that he was not a 9 or 10 year old. Now, suddenly, in chapter 5, everyone’s age is given to us, right up to v. 32, and Noah. As well, the relative ages and time continue on into the flood account and beyond.

Another interesting contrast is that, whereas Abel died as a result of his faith, Enoch did not – literally did not (Gen. 5:21-24). He was the very first person translated to heaven fully and physically alive. This blessing is shared only by one other person in the Bible – Elijah, as recorded on II Kings 2:11. The Genesis account tells us (v. 24) “*Enoch walked with God.*” Now that is said of only 1 other person in the Bible – Noah, in Genesis 6:9. So Enoch had a very unique relationship with God. The Genesis 5 record makes no specific mention of Enoch’s faith, yet his faith is the basis for his inclusion in Hebrews 11, and the expression of the fact that, “*without faith it is impossible to please God*” directly follows verse 5 and the account of Enoch. Since he “*walked with God*” and was taken alive to heaven with God, then he must have pleased God, as Heb. 11:5 tells us and the principle expressed in Amos 3:3 certainly applies – “*Do two walk together unless they have agreed to meet?*”

⁶ Phillips. P. 410-411

Of all the people actually named in Hebrews 11, it is likely that the most obscure of those for whom detail is supplied, is Enoch. He is mentioned briefly in only Genesis 5, Hebrews 11 and Jude 14-16. What we know from these 3 texts is that he was the seventh patriarch in the line of Adam through Seth, and at age 65, he fathered a son – Methuselah – whose main claim to fame is that he is the oldest recorded person in the Bible, dying at age 969. Enoch himself walked with God, was translated from earth to heaven alive at age 365, that he had faith, and that he was a preacher and a prophet, whose topic of prophetic truth was coming judgment as Jude 14-16 fills in for us.

The fact that stands out in Genesis 5 and Hebrews 11:5 is that he was faithful and righteous, and entered heaven without physically dying. This man had God-given faith that dictated the pattern of his life. But what does it mean for a man to *‘walk with god’*?

It speaks of companionship, a living relationship, personal knowledge and an increasing understanding of the One we walk with. We have already mentioned Amos 3:3, so when the One we walk with is God, there is an obvious hierarchy that must be considered. He is the Lord, we are His disciples; He is the teacher, we are His pupils; He is the Father, we are His children.

This is what the Christian life is supposed to be; a life that abides in fellowship with God and with God’s people, striving to please Him in obedience and bringing others to Him. Christ told His disciples that *“Apart from Me you can do nothing.”* (JN 15:5) To be a Christian is more than just believing or assenting to doctrines (true though they are), but to rejoice to be living in the ‘presence of God’. The focus in Heb. 11:5 is Enoch and his immediate rise to heaven, and the fact is it was as a result of his pleasing God. *“While walking with God involves more than simple obedience to His commands, obedience is necessary and integral to any life lived in fellowship with God.”*⁷

I mentioned earlier that, in Genesis 5, the Bible begins to record people’s ages for us for the first time. Let me point out a common phrase that turns up in every case in Genesis 5, with the exception of Enoch. The phrase is *“and he died”*. The Bible points out in Genesis 5:21-22 that first, at 65 years old, Enoch fathered a son, whom he named Methuselah, and as already mentioned, he lived to be 969. A.W. Pink points out that his name means *“when he is dead, it shall be sent”*.⁸ In saying this, Pink believes that Enoch (as a prophet, per Jude), received a revelation from God about the coming flood judgment, which was yet almost 1,000 years off, and at that time, changed Enoch’s heart and set him on the path to walk with Him till he was 365 years old.

Since Enoch avoided death and was taken up long before the flood, many Dispensationalists see him as a type of the Raptured church. He is taken alive into heaven well before the flood comes, which would have been about 604 years after his departure with God, based on Methuselah’s name per Pink. It is a somewhat

⁷ Richard Phillips, p. 417

⁸ A.W. Pink, *Gleanings in Genesis*, Moody, 1922/76, p. 78

legitimate expression of a type, but I don't consider it a strong type. Noah and his family also survived the flood, but were borne through it on an ark.

A more strenuous case is made by some, based on Heb. 9:27, that Enoch (and Elijah) will be the 2 witnesses mentioned in revelation's account of the Tribulation in Rev. 11:1-2, since they never died during their own era, but the 2 witnesses, who are decidedly OT characters, do die during the Tribulation. Some people, some resurrected in the OT, and like Lazarus in John 11, and those mentioned in Matthew 27:52-53, and others Jesus resurrected in the Gospels, or those raised by Paul, etc. actually died twice. So, we do better to stick to what the Bible does tell us, and by studying the unique character, Enoch, we realise that God has graciously revealed that, by His grace, fallen man can come into great and joyful relationship with Him, as He provides this to us in Christ!

We don't want to skip over the last part of Heb. 11:5 – *“Now before he was taken, he was commended as having pleased God.”* Now, this provides a perfect segue into v. 6, but it reveals what pleased God about Enoch.

Recall first, Heb. 11:1. Arthur Pink comments – “Faith always presupposes a Divine revelation. Faith must have a foundation to rest upon, and that foundation must be the word of Him who cannot lie. God had spoken and Enoch believed. But what a testing of faith! God declared that Enoch should be removed from the earth to heaven, without passing through the portal of the grave. One, two, three hundred years passed, but Enoch believed God, and before the fourth century was completed, His promise was fulfilled. “That he should not see death” was the reward of his pleasing God.”⁹

Pink also, a couple of passages earlier in his commentary on Hebrews 11 points this out;

“Now that which is a fact of Christian doctrine needs to become a fact of Christian experience: we need to enjoy the good, the power, the blessedness of it in our souls day by day. And this can only be as a supernatural faith is in exercise. A bare knowledge of doctrine is practically worthless, unless the heart earnestly seeks from God a practical outworking of it. It is one thing to believe that I have judicially passed from death unto life, it is quite another to live practically in the realm of life. But that is exactly what a life of faith is: it is a being lifted above the things which are seen, and a being occupied with those things which are unseen. It is for the affections to be no longer set on things on the earth, but to have them fixed on things in heaven.

Perhaps the reader is inclined to say, The ideal you set before us is indeed beautiful but it is impossible for flesh and blood to attain unto it. Quite true dear friend; we fully grant it. Of himself the Christian can no more live practically upon resurrection-ground than Enoch could transport himself to heaven.”¹⁰

As we move on to look at verse 6 in our study, we'll see how such a miraculous spiritual and physical event is supported by the way faith pleases God.

⁹ A.W. Pink, The Heroes of Faith, p. 29-30

¹⁰ IBID, p. 27-28