

FAITH OF THE SAINTS

HEBREWS 11



T. M. Moore

A Scriptorium Study from The Fellowship of Ailbe

The Fellowship of Ailbe

Faith of the Saints: Hebrews 11
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Hebrews 11: Introduction

The writer's purpose in chapter 11 seems to be to properly orient his first readers to Jesus. They were drifting from Him, under pressure by their Hebrew friends and family members, and they were contemplating a return to the Old Covenant religion of Judaism.

In chapter 11 the writer shows that those Old Testament saints all looked forward to the coming day of salvation, now and forever, which God accomplished in Jesus. They held fast to their faith and were able to achieve many great things and endure much suffering. Their example can help us to keep the faith in troubling times.

We're pleased to make this resource available for personal or group study at no charge, and we hope you will find this series helpful in realizing more of the presence, promise, and power of the Kingdom of God.

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1 What Is Faith?

Introduction

It takes faith to believe in Jesus, and it takes faith to endure in Him. Unless we understand what faith is, and how it operates to keep us in God's rest, we will be subject to drift at the slightest provocation. This longest chapter in the book of Hebrews, therefore, zeroes in on the question of faith, setting forth examples of faith for us to emulate. But the writer takes nothing for granted. He begins by the most succinct and important definition of faith in all of Scripture, and we will look at that definition in today's study.

Read Psalm 91.

Read Hebrews 11.1-3.

Think it through.

1. True and saving faith consists of two things: substance and evidence. The *substance* of what we believe matters supremely. How would you summarize the *substance* of what Christians believe? Faith resides in the soul – heart, mind, and conscience. How does the *substance* of what Christians believe affect how they think, what they feel, and what they value? The second aspect of faith is *evidence*. When the *substance* of our faith is doing its work in our soul, we expect *evidence* or *proof* of that inward transformation to be visible in our lives. Meditate on Ephesians 2.8-10. What “good works” should Christians be working to bring forth in their lives as evidence of true and lively faith? Is drawing back from Jesus a good work? Explain.

2. Faith focuses on “things hoped for” and “things not seen.” What things? Such faith leads to “a *good* testimony.” What does the writer mean by this? If we *say* we have faith, but then draw back from Jesus when opposition or threats arise, is that a good testimony? Explain. Faith affects everything about our lives, beginning with our worldview. How does faith teach us to understand the beginnings of the world? Meditate on Psalm 33.8, 9. Why should we fear God? What does His power to create everything out of nothing say about Him? About what He can do? Does it matter what we believe about how the cosmos began? Explain.

Meditate.

“Faith then is seeing things not plain, he means, and brings what are not seen to the same full assurance with what are seen. So then neither is it possible to disbelieve in things which are seen, nor, on the other hand, can there be faith unless a person is more fully assured with respect to things invisible than he is with respect to things that are most clearly seen. For since the objects of hope seem to be unsubstantial, faith gives them substantiality or, rather, does not give it, but is itself their substance.” *John Chrysostom (344-407 AD)*

For this they willfully forget: that by the word of God the heavens were of old, and the earth standing out of water and in the water, by which the world that then existed perished, being flooded with water. 2 Peter 3.5, 6

Strengthen in me assurance of faith, O Lord, that I may live boldly for...

Pray Psalm 91.1, 2.

As you pray, envision yourself being where these verses set you, and saying what they lead you to say.

Psalm 91.1-3 (*Lauda Anima: Praise My Soul the King of Heaven*)

All who dwell within God's shelter in His shadow will reside.

He our Tow'r, our Fortress ever, in Him we our trust confide.

From the trapper's snares He saves us; safe from sickness we abide.

2 Faith of the Saints

Introduction

It is important to remember that the saints of old, whom we revere and seek to emulate, were people of faith. They underwent hardships *by faith*, that is, by keeping focused on things hoped-for but unseen. They did not allow temporal threats or difficulties to deter them from obeying God's will. They *believed* God and trusted that lasting rest would only be found in Him, and by obeying His Word. Their faith was pleasing to God, and He credited their faith as righteousness, and rewarded their faith by giving them Himself and His rest.

Read Genesis 15.1-6.

Read Hebrews 11.4-12.

Think it through.

1. Summarize the act of faith – the *evidence* of faith – highlighted for each of the following:

- Abel:
- Enoch:
- Noah:
- Abraham:
- Sarah:

What “unseen things” were they focusing on as they believed God? Which of these were eternal? Which were temporal?

2. We cannot please God apart from faith (v. 6). Why not? What does our living by faith communicate to God? Did faith cost any of these great saints in any way? Why were they willing to endure that cost? What would have been the lesson of these saints to the first readers of the book of Hebrews? What is the lesson to you?

Meditate.

“And so that the favors of heavenly condescension might not be lacking to any period of this transitory world, those who lived from the inception of the world up to the time of the giving of circumcision, and those from other countries who lived after the giving of circumcision, also pleased God. [They did so] either by the offering of sacrificial offerings or alternatively by the virtue of faith alone, since they committed their souls and those of their own to the Creator, and so [they] took care to free themselves from the bonds of the original guilt. For ‘without faith it is impossible to please God.’” *The Venerable Bede (672-735 AD)*

So we are always confident, knowing that while we are at home in the body we are absent from the Lord. For we walk by faith, not by sight. 2 Corinthians 5.6, 7

I believe, Lord, that You have saved me by Your life, death, and resurrection. Help me to believe daily in You as I...

Pray Psalm 91.1-8.

What is God calling you to today as you follow Jesus? What snares, trials, or terrors threaten you? Commit them to the Lord and take shelter in His refuge – now and throughout the day.

Psalm 91.1-6 (*Lauda Anima: Praise My Soul the King of Heaven*)

All who dwell within God's shelter in His shadow will reside.

He our Tow'r, our Fortress ever, in Him we our trust confide.

From the trapper's snares He saves us; safe from sickness we abide.

He will shade us with His pinions, 'neath His wings we safety find.

From night's terror, from day's arrow, from the fears that stalk our mind.

When destruction falls at noon time, safe in Him shall we abide.

3 Things to Come

Introduction

The ultimate objective of faith is to enable us to pass through this life, with all its trials and tribulations, and arrive safely in the City to Come, which Christ is preparing for us even now (Psalm 84). But we need to believe that this coming city is a *better* city than the one we inhabit here, and that it offers *better promises* than anything in this world. Even Joseph, who had a pretty good life in the here-and-now city of Egypt, longed for the promised land he knew would some day be the possession of all God's faithful people. We should learn from the patriarchs to keep our focus on the things that are to come.

Read Genesis 50.22-26.

Read Hebrews 11.13-22.

Think it through.

1. What's the difference between *having* the promises of God and being *assured* of the promises (v. 13)? Why do we commend the faith of the patriarchs, because they *had* the promises or because they were *assured* of them? The ultimate promise is described in our text as "a homeland" and a "heavenly country" and a "city" yet to come. To what do these refer? What makes this City to Come so special? The patriarchs saw this city "afar off." What do you "see" when you think of this coming city? Do you think we should work a little harder at being able to *see* the coming city? Explain. What does it mean to be "strangers and pilgrims" in this life?

2. The writer mentions four patriarchs who, because they kept their eyes on the City to Come, were able to hold fast their confession and obey God, even when the demands were difficult. What was the evidence each of these produced – Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph – to show that they were focusing on unseen and hoped-for things? What lessons of faith should we learn from their example?

Meditate.

"For of what kind are those good things likely to be, of which God is the preparer and establisher? For if immediately after God had made us, when we had not yet done anything, God freely bestowed so great favors—paradise, familiar intercourse with God's own self, immortality, a life happy and free from cares—what will God not bestow on those who have labored and struggled so greatly and endured on God's behalf? For us God did not spare God's only begotten. For us when we were enemies God gave up God's own son to death. Of what will God not count us worthy, having become God's friends? What will God not impart to us, having reconciled us to God's own self?" *John Chrysostom (344-407 AD)*

But as it is written:

"Eye has not seen, nor ear heard,

Nor have entered into the heart of man

The things which God has prepared for those who love Him."

But God has revealed them to us through His Spirit. For the Spirit searches all things, yes, the deep things of God. 1 Corinthians 2.9, 10

Your way, O Lord, is to lead us in life by precious and very great promises, even promises of things unseen. Help me to see these "from afar" so that I...

Pray Psalm 91.1-13.

As you pray, be sure to mention with gratitude the various unseen things mentioned in this psalm.

Psalm 91.1-13 (*Lauda Anima: Praise My Soul the King of Heaven*)

All who dwell within God's shelter in His shadow will reside.
He our Tow'r, our Fortress ever, in Him we our trust confide.
From the trapper's snares He saves us; safe from sickness we abide.

He will shade us with His pinions, 'neath His wings we safety find.
From night's terror, from day's arrow, from the fears that stalk our mind.
When destruction falls at noon time, safe in Him shall we abide.

Thousands at our sides may falter – it will not to us come near!
We instead shall see the end of all who at God's mercy sneer.
Evil shall no more befall us for we hold the Lord most dear.

He shall give His angels charge to bear us up, lest we should fall;
They will guard and carry all who on the Savior's mercy call.
Cobra, mighty lion, serpent: We shall tread upon them all!

4 The Faith of Moses

Introduction

The writer of Hebrews wants to encourage his readers to persist in faith and not to draw back from their firm belief in Jesus. The saints of the Old Covenant believed God and looked forward to the realization of His promises. The first readers of Hebrews were looking away from those promises and back at the Old Covenant from which Christ had delivered them. As Stephen had done before the Sanhedrin, the writer shows his readers that even as they look back, they are instructed to look to Jesus and rest in Him.

Read Acts 7.16-50.

Read Hebrews 11.23-39.

Think it through.

1. By his faith, Moses was able to overcome great challenges. Which challenges does our writer mention, and why would each of these have been relevant for his first readers? Why are they relevant for us? Moses' faith led him to *choose* suffering, rather than draw back from it. What should the first readers, who were considering returning to the religion of Moses, have learned from Moses?

2. In verse 26 the writer mentions that Moses esteemed "the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt; for he looked to the reward." What reward? How did he "look" to that reward? How is that instructive for us? The mention of Passover in verse 28 was important to the writer's argument. This was *the* great sacrifice of the Jews. But what has the writer already told us about *all* such sacrifices? Review Exodus 12.1-28. How did the Passover point forward to the sacrifice of Jesus?

Meditate.

"If then we too always see God with our mind, if we always think in remembrance of God, all things will appear enduring to us, all things tolerable. We shall bear them all easily. We shall be above them all." *John Chrysostom (344-407AD)*

"*This is that Moses who said to the children of Israel, "The LORD your God will raise up for you a Prophet like me from your brethren. Him you shall hear."*" Acts 7.37

Thank You, Lord, for the example of Moses. As he trusted You, so help me today to...

Pray Psalm 91.14-16.

As you pray, put your own name in place of the relevant personal pronouns ("he" and "his" in v. 14, and so forth). Give thanks and praise to God accordingly

Psalm 91.14-16 (*Lauda Anima: Praise My Soul the King of Heaven*)

Save us, Lord! We love You only; set us up secure on high!

You we know, on You we call in trouble: Hear us when we cry!

Show us Your salvation, let long life forever satisfy!

5 Faith of the Saints of Old

Introduction

The writer invites his first readers to consider the faith and sufferings of those saints – those “excellent ones” (Ps. 16.3) – who have gone before. As he will remind his readers in chapter 12, they haven’t experienced anything like this. Their forebears in the faith did not draw back in the face of suffering but held fast their confession. So should we, for who knows what great things God might do in and through us if only we keep our eyes on Him and our feet in the path of obedience?

Read Psalm 16.1-11.

Read Hebrews 11.30-38.

Think it through.

1. The focus of verses 30-35 is on what the saints of old were able to accomplish by their faith. How would you describe the relationship between faith and obedience, as this is suggested by the examples given here? How does faith work to engender obedience? How does obedience validate faith? Can we say that we have faith if we have no obedience, or if we’re always drawing back from Christ in the face of threats? Explain. What might we expect God to do *through* us as we persevere in faith?

2. In verses 36 and 37 the writer emphasizes how faith enabled the saints of old to endure hardship. How does faith work to help a believer endure such hardships as these? How through faith can we *prepare* for such trials? How by faith are we enabled to *persevere* through such trials? How might we expect God to *sustain* us in trials as we persevere in faith?

Meditate.

“Here is the narrow and close way that leads to life. Here are the teachers and prophets, ‘wandering in deserts, mountains, caves and holes in the earth.’ Here are the apostles and evangelists ... living as citizens of the desert.” *Basil the Great (330-379 AD)*

For to this you were called, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow His steps:

“Who committed no sin,

Nor was deceit found in His mouth”;

who, when He was reviled, did not revile in return; when He suffered, He did not threaten, but committed Himself to Him who judges righteously... 1 Peter 2.21-23

Lord, I cannot know what trials of faith I might encounter today. Help me to prepare for them by...

Pray Psalm 91.1-3, 14-16.

What does it mean to “abide under the shadow of the Almighty,” not only first thing in the day, but throughout the day? Wait in silence for the Lord to show you, then give Him thanks and praise as you prepare for this day’s trials.

Psalm 91.1-3, 14-16 (*Lauda Anima: Praise My Soul the King of Heaven*)

All who dwell within God’s shelter in His shadow will reside.

He our Tow’r, our Fortress ever, in Him we our trust confide.

From the trapper’s snares He saves us; safe from sickness we abide.

Save us, Lord! We love You only; set us up secure on high!

You we know, on You we call in trouble: Hear us when we cry!

Show us Your salvation, let long life forever satisfy!

6 Not without Us

Introduction

As amazing and admirable as were the feats of faith of our Old Testament forebears, yet the saints did not receive the promises in their day, but faithfully looked forward to them. In our day, the writer has been arguing, the promised rest has now come through our Lord Jesus Christ. All the saints we admire looked forward to Him. How can we even think about looking away from Jesus?

Meditate on Psalm 78.1-8.

Read Hebrews 11.38-40.

Think it through.

1. Why was the world “not worthy” of these Old Testament saints (v. 38)? Is it any more worthy of faithful saints from the New Testament forward? Why then were those old saints left alive? And why are we left alive? What does this suggest about God’s view of the world? Of our role in the world? The saints of old looked forward to the promised rest of God, and persevered in faith to obtain “a good testimony.” What is a good testimony? Is this something we should be seeking? How?

2. The writer indicates that the promise of being made “perfect” (in the hope and rest of God’s favor) was not realized by those Old Testament saints until it was achieved by the finished work of Christ. Meditate on Matthew 27.51-54. These actions were meant to show symbolically that now the promised rest of God had been attained and was available. Explain. God has “provided something better for us” than even what He provided the saints of the Old Testament. What is that? What is the effect of laying hold on that “better” thing?

Meditate.

“For indeed, even the apostles have not yet received their joy, but they also wait that I may be a partaker of their joy. For the saints, when they leave this place, do not immediately obtain the whole rewards of their merits. They also wait for us, though we delay, even though we remain.” *Origen of Alexandria (185-254 AD)*

Nevertheless we, according to His promise, look for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells. 2 Peter 3.13

Lord, teach me to live forward, toward Your promises, toward the City to Come, so that in all my here and now I...

Pray Psalm 91.1-13.

Meditate on the “secret place of the Most High” and His “shadow.” How can thinking on these deliver you today from temptations and trials so that you abide in the Lord as your “dwelling place” and “refuge”?

Psalm 91.1-13 (*Lauda Anima: Praise My Soul the King of Heaven*)

All who dwell within God’s shelter in His shadow will reside.

He our Tow’r, our Fortress ever, in Him we our trust confide.

From the trapper’s snares He saves us; safe from sickness we abide.

He will shade us with His pinions, ‘neath His wings we safety find.

From night’s terror, from day’s arrow, from the fears that stalk our mind.

When destruction falls at noon time, safe in Him shall we abide.

Thousands at our sides may falter – it will not to us come near!

Faith of the Saints: Hebrews 11

We instead shall see the end of all who at God's mercy sneer.
Evil shall no more befall us for we hold the Lord most dear.

He shall give His angels charge to bear us up, lest we should fall;
They will guard and carry all who on the Savior's mercy call.
Cobra, mighty lion, serpent: We shall tread upon them all!

7 Toward, not Away

Introduction

For those who have come to a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ, there is no excuse for looking away from Him. Like the saints of the Old Testament, we must look forward to the promised rest of God. They endured much and achieved much by looking past or through their circumstances to the hope of a City to Come, where they would abide in God's dwelling place and know the safe refuge of His loving care. We must let their example instruct, encourage, and embolden us as we face various trials and temptations, so that we persist in straining toward the Lord and His promises, and resist every inclination to draw back and drift away.

Read and meditate on Psalm 91.

Read Hebrews 11.

Think it through.

1. Which of the Old Testament saints mentioned in this chapter speaks most pointedly to where you are in your walk of faith at this time? Why? How can you see that the faith of these saints truly matches the definition of faith given in verse 1? What can we learn from Hebrews 11 about how to read the Old Testament?
2. What is your vision of the City to Come? Where could you look in Scripture to flesh out that vision more completely? Why can we gain strength from meditating on that vision? Can you think of a hymn that might help you to keep that vision before you each day? How about Psalm 91?

Meditate.

“What then is the reward of so great a change? What is the recompense? They have not yet received it but are still waiting; and after thus dying in so great tribulation, they have not yet received it. They gained their victory so many ages ago but have not yet received their reward. And you who are yet in the conflict, are you vexed?”
John Chrysostom (344-407 AD)

Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth. For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. Colossians 3.2, 3

Lord Jesus, I know You are preparing a place for me. Help me to remember that always, that I may daily strive to...

Pray Psalm 91.1-16.

Try memorizing a portion of this psalm to pray throughout the day. Use it whenever you need to shelter in the Lord and focus on His dwelling place.

Psalm 91.1-16 (*Lauda Anima: Praise My Soul the King of Heaven*)

All who dwell within God's shelter in His shadow will reside.
He our Tow'r, our Fortress ever, in Him we our trust confide.
From the trapper's snares He saves us; safe from sickness we abide.

He will shade us with His pinions, 'neath His wings we safety find.
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Faith of the Saints: Hebrews 11

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He shall give His angels charge to bear us up, lest we should fall;
They will guard and carry all who on the Savior's mercy call.
Cobra, mighty lion, serpent: We shall tread upon them all!

Save us, Lord! We love You only; set us up secure on high!
You we know, on You we call in trouble: Hear us when we cry!
Show us Your salvation, let long life forever satisfy!

Questions for Reflection or Discussion

1. What are the Old Testament saints mentioned in this chapter regarded as heroes of the faith? What do they teach us about faith?
2. In what sense is faith an inward and subjective matter? In what sense is it outward and objective?
3. What are the “things hoped for” and “things not seen” that we should be looking to in our faith? How does that help us?
4. Why is it impossible to please God apart from faith?
5. What’s the most important lesson you’ve learned from this study? How are you putting that lesson to work in your life?

For prayer:

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Thank you.