

## Guided Bible Study: Week 13

June 13-19, 2020

**During the time we cannot have Sunday School and Wednesday Bible Study due to the Corona Virus emergency, Rick is posting a guided Bible study on here to help fill the void left by not having those classes. We encourage you to read the passages in the Bible together with your family. We will post the study for each week.**

### HEBREWS, Chapter 11

The 11<sup>th</sup> chapter of Hebrews is often called the “Hall of Fame of the Faithful”. Quite a number of Old Testament characters are mentioned for their faith put to steadfast action. It builds off the platform the writer left at the end of chapter 10 when he wrote of Christians, *“But we are not of those who shrink back and are destroyed, but of those who believe and are saved.”* (Hebrews 10.39) The actions of those mentioned in Chapter 11 move us to have such an active, steadfast faith as well.

Since the Covid-19 restrictions ended my Wednesday night Bible Study class just before we started this chapter, I decided to share commentary about it via these means. The length of the chapter and the depth of the material will cause me to take probably three weeks to cover the chapter. I hope it will bring a bit of closure for my Wednesday students but will also be of general interest for all of you since it is so applicable to our daily walk with God. As I list the verse or verses being considered, please read them in the Bible.

**Hebrews 11.1:** This is a description of faith rather than a definition. A definition of faith is more along the lines of faith being “the belief of testimony”. [Read: Romans 10.17] My college professor for the book of Hebrews, Russell E. Boatman, likened faith, as described in this verse, to a vehicle to get us somewhere. In this case it gets us to a relationship with God through Christ, resulting in eternal life.

When it speaks of “**being sure of what we hope for**”: The word for “sure” in the original Greek indicates “that which stands under”. Faith is the foundation on which hope is built, thus giving substance to our hope because it is real (as opposed to any hope I might have of playing in the NBA).

It also says that faith makes us “**certain of what we do not see**”. Some versions call this the “conviction” of things not seen. When someone is charged we might think they committed a crime but when they are convicted we are much more certain. Our faith is built on evidence such as the miracles, changed lives, and -first and foremost- Jesus’ resurrection. On the basis of

that testimony, that evidence, we are convicted, we are certain, of God's existence even though we don't see Him. We are certain that Christ can save us and that He's God's Son, even though we didn't observe his death, burial, and resurrection firsthand.

**Hebrews 11.2:** This speaks of the people of God who trusted Him and His promises in the Old Testament. We are about to see quite a few of them set forth as examples of faith for us. The Greek word rendered "ancients" in the NIV is a form of "presbuteros", the same term translated "elders" in I Peter 5.1, dealing with elders in the church. Would that elders today always have the same active, obedient, courageous faith of the people of old we're about to study! What an example we would set for the church!

**Hebrews 11.3:** This stands as a blow to the theory of evolution. Visible material did not come together somehow to form this universe. It came about by the will and word of God, the only One capable of making matter, of making something out of nothing. [Read Hebrews 1.2] Remember Christ acted with God the Father in creation. We're reminded that the One who is the object of our faith is better than anyone or anything else.

At the same time we gather that while there is increasing scientific evidence for creation, creation may never be fully provable scientifically, real as it indeed is! Rather, we get our understanding of origins by faith. Thus we are sure about that which we weren't around to see.

**Hebrews 11.4:** This is from the 4<sup>th</sup> chapter of Genesis. Some have speculated that Cain did not bring the *best* of his crops, but more commentators lean toward the idea that he was supposed to bring an animal sacrifice even if he had to acquire an animal. Prior to the giving of the Law there is no evidence God ever ordained any sacrifice or offering other than animal sacrifice. Instead of believing God enough to obey, Cain thought he could substitute what he wanted to do.

Abel had enough faith to take God at His word and obey what God commanded. Through such obedient faith Abel showed himself to be righteous. His faith speaks to us about obedience even though he was murdered and has been dead for a long time. [DISCUSS: What does Abel's faith say to us? Be sure to include these: 1) Faith is the way to be righteous in God's eyes and is, thus, worthwhile. 2) Faith may be costly but is still worthwhile.]

**Hebrews 11.5:** This is from *Genesis 5.21-24*. Little is known about Enoch but certainly the faith of one who so closely walked with God that God spared him the experience of death challenges us to walk by faith as well. Russell E. Boatman said, "Faith is supposed to keep us walking so close to God that should He come now, we would be ready to go home with Him."

**Hebrews 11.6:** This is one of the most significant verses in the Bible. There is absolutely no way to be pleasing to God without faith. Unbelief leads to disobedience and breaks our fellowship with God. We must do more than just intellectually accept the existence of God. Two matters of equal importance are joined here. One is to **believe God exists**. The other is to **believe He rewards those who earnestly seek Him**. This will be illustrated by the obedience of the Old Testament heroes described throughout this chapter. For us it involves coming to God in the

prescribed way for our era: Jesus Christ. (**Read John 14.6**) It also involves putting our faith into action. (**Read James 2.14-26**)

**Hebrews 11.7:** Scholars are divided over whether “things not yet seen” included rain. Some, particularly those who believe in a much different atmosphere before the Flood, jump on Genesis 2.4-6 to push the idea that rain was unknown before the Flood. While the NIV renders Genesis 2.6 “streams”, several good translations including the New American Standard (usually the most accurate with the Greek and Hebrew texts) and the King James say “mist”. However, in context this verse in Genesis refers to the very beginning of creation. Hundreds of years passed before the Flood and there is little strong evidence one way or the other whether this condition continued until then. Even if one accepts the “water canopy” concept of a different pre-flood atmosphere it does not automatically rule out rain. What Noah definitely had not previously experienced was a world-wide flood. Perhaps, depending on the terrain where he lived, he had not experienced any kind of flood.

How did Noah “**condemn the world**”? Noah’s obedience was an indictment on those who persisted in their disobedience. [**Read II Peter 2.5**] Noah preached during the 120 years he was building the ark. This further condemned the world through the people’s rejection of his message.

Noah was, overall, a righteous man. Yet, like we, he was also a sinner. His real righteousness in God’s eyes came by his faith. The same is true for us. [**Read Romans 3.21-26 and Philippians 3.8-9**]

[**DISCUSS:** Noah was warned about things not yet seen. Does God sometimes ask us to do things we don’t quite understand or agree with? What should be our response of faith in such situations?]

**Hebrews 11.8-10:** Abraham was one of the greatest men of God and greatest men of faith. His name appears more than three hundred times over twenty-seven of the books of the Bible. He was called of God in the midst of idolatry. His home town, Ur, was the center of moon worship. Amid this culture, Abraham worshipped God or else he would not have obeyed God. People of faith are open to God’s call.

[**Read Genesis 12.1-3**] This is Abraham’s call in substance. The land to be given him was unknown to him at the time. To leave home and leave loved ones shows strong faith, just as it does, today, for missionaries and even some who serve in this country but a long way from home.

Abraham went out to Haran where he remained for five years. It was there his father died and from which he went on to Canaan. Abraham, called Abram at the time, was 75 years old when he left Haran. Even though people were still living somewhat longer during his time than today (Abraham lived 175 years) people were not living 800 and 900 years any more. Abraham was considered to be advanced in years when he left Ur. People of faith are never too old to obey God in adventures of faith!

[**DISCUSS:** Even though Canaan was to be an inheritance for Abraham and his

descendants, apparently he never truly treated it like home. Instead he lived as a sojourner, looking ahead to an eternal home. We sing, “This world is not my home; I’m just a passing through...”, but do we live it the way Abraham did? How can we become less earth-bound and more heaven-bound in our approach to life?]

**Hebrews 11.11-12:** The NIV, at least the edition I have, renders Abraham as the subject of verse 11. More translations, including the traditional King James and highly accurate New American Standard, render Sarah as the subject. While I have a lot of college hours in the Koine Greek, I’m not as expert at the language as are professional translators. However, from what I can read from good scholars, I tend toward the position of the King James and New American Standard. If you have one of those translations available, read this verse in it.

The point of the verses is not obscured by the difficulty with the translation. Abraham and Sarah were too old to have children when God blessed them with Isaac. Despite initial laughter, probably a “You’ve got to be kidding” laughter, they believed God and opened themselves to this blessing. Great things happen in response to faith!