

Hebrews 11:1-12 – What Faith Is

Jesus is superior to “old time” prophets, angels, Moses, Joshua and the Aaronic priests. He is the mediator of a new and better covenant. How does someone enter the better rest that comes through Jesus Christ? Hebrews 4:3 says “we who have believed enter that rest”. Chapter 10 ended with the mention of “faith”. “My righteous one shall live by faith”. What is faith? What does faith look like? These questions are answered in Hebrews chapter 11. The word “faith” occurs 24 times. 18 verses start with “by faith” (3-5, 7-9, 11, 17, 20-24 and 27-31).

Read Hebrews 11:1-6.

Based on verse 1, what is faith? ESV has “assurance” in the first phrase. NKJV has “substance”. NASB 2020 has “certainty”. NIV has “confidence”. The word “assurance/substance” occurs 5 times in the NT and 3 of those occurrences are in Hebrews. In 1:3 it is used of the substantial nature of God when it says that the Son is “the exact representation of His nature”. TDNT says “Melancthon advised Luther to use the rendering ‘sure confidence.’” which deviated from how the early and medieval church understood this word in Heb. 11:1. TDNT says “Faith is now viewed as personal, subjective conviction. This interpretation has governed Protestant exposition of the passage almost completely”. TDNT prefers the translation “Faith is the reality of what is hoped for”. The KJV may have used the pre-Luther translation. ESV, NASB and NIV follow Luther’s translation. For the second phrase, ESV has “conviction”. NKJV has “evidence”. NASB has “proof”. NIV has “assurance”. BDAG says the word here means a “proving” or “conviction”. For the second half of the verse, TDNT suggests that faith is “the divinely given conviction of things unseen”. (11:1)

In verse 2, by faith, what did the Old Testament believers receive? ESV has “commendation”. NIV is similar to ESV. NKJV has “a good testimony”. NASB has “approval”. This was a common word used for “testify” but in this context BDAG says it means “be well spoken of, be approved”. NKJV’s “elders” refers to “old timey people”. (11:2)

How do we know that the universe/world was created by the word of God? Do we base this knowledge on science? (11:3)

Why was Abel’s sacrifice to God more acceptable than Cain’s sacrifice? How do we know that God commended (same word as vs. 2) Abel as righteous? How did Abel die? How does he still speak to us today? See Gen. 4:1-10. (11:4)

How and why was Enoch taken by God? See Genesis 5:21-24. (11:5)

What must be true of the person who pleases and draws near to God? (11:6)

Read Hebrews 11:7-12.

Why did it take faith for Noah to build the ark based on God's warning? What three things came from building the ark by faith? See Genesis 6:5-9:19. (11:7)

In verse 8, what did Abraham do by faith? What were some of the challenges that Abraham faced? See Gen. 11:27-12:9. (11:8)

In verse 9, what did Abraham do by faith? BDAG translates part of this verse as "sojourn in a land as if it were foreign". The mention of Isaac and Jacob includes a time span of three generations. How were Isaac and Jacob described? (11:9)

In verse 10, what was Abraham looking forward to? The city with foundations is in contrast to sojourning in tents. How was the city described? What city is this? See verse 16. (11:10)

What did Sarah do by faith? How does this fit with Sarah's laughing when God told her that she would bear a son? See Genesis 18:1-15. Reading about Abraham and Sarah, we know that people of faith can have moments of doubt. (11:11)

Abraham was 100 years old when Isaac was born. Sarah was about 90 when Isaac was born. See Gen. 17:17. Why did they believe they would have a son? Exodus chapter one talks about how the descendants of Jacob multiplied greatly in the land of Egypt. What did God promise to Abraham? See Gen. 12:1-3; 13:14-17; 15:4-7, 18-21; 17:3-8; 22:15-18. In Abraham's lifetime, did he see the full fulfillment of God's promise? See verse 13. (11:12)