

HEBREWS CHAPTER ELEVEN

We all love inspiring stories. Tales about people who overcame adversity, conquered a huge challenge, or demonstrated great courage in dire circumstances. “The King’s Speech,” starring Colin Firth, demonstrates this point. This movie, which tells the story of King George VI’s victory over a debilitating speech impediment, connects with viewers and critics alike. Recently, the Academy awarded the movie with “Best Picture,” “Best Actor,” “Best Director,” and “Best Original Screenplay” Oscars. Real-life human examples like this one encourage us to strive, stand firm, be courageous, and rise to the challenge.

The author of Hebrews ended chapter 10 with another call for his hearers to persevere in the face of persecution. “You need to persevere so that when you have done the will of God, you will receive what He has promised” (Hebrews 10:36). Following this exhortation, the author launches into a beautiful list of examples of those who were faithful and therefore received what God had promised. This list of heroes and heroines, commonly known as “the Hall of Faith,” encouraged them- and should encourage us- to hold onto their hope and faith in Christ even through the most difficult of times.

The author employs two literary devices in his list. First, he uses repetition. The phrase, “by faith,” emphasizes the necessity of building our lives on a solid faith foundation. Second, the author uses an example list. This literary device, common in the ancient world, built overwhelming evidence to support a preferred course of action. Here, the author uses dozens of Biblical examples to support his contention that his hearers will receive God’s promises when they stand firm in their faith through all circumstances.

Faith Defined

Read Hebrews 11:1-3.

What is faith? Real, biblical faith is much more than hoping something is true. Christians don’t have to go through life with their fingers crossed. Faith is not illogical, blind acceptance either. Our God can stand up under any scrutiny. We cannot see Him with physical eyes, but God and His spiritual promises are a reality we can experience.

Read Hebrews 11:1-3 from the Amplified Bible below. Underline words and phrases that help you understand the meaning of faith.

NOW FAITH is the assurance (the confirmation, the title deed) of the things [we] hope for, being the proof of things [we] do not see and the conviction of their reality [faith perceiving as real fact what is not revealed to the senses].

For by [faith--trust and holy fervor born of faith] the men of old had divine testimony borne to them and obtained a good report.

By faith we understand that the worlds [during the successive ages] were framed (fashioned, put in order, and equipped for their intended purpose) by the word of God, so that what we see was not made out of things which are visible.

After reflecting on these verses, write a biblical definition for faith.

We can have a firm confidence in the existence of God, His character, and His promises. Many of His promises are yet to be fulfilled, but we can be certain God will keep them. We may still have questions about God and His ways, but we can trust completely in the One who has all the answers.

Jump ahead and read Hebrews 11:6. What must a person have to please God? How is it demonstrated?

Faith All-Stars

Read Hebrews 11:4-38.

Reread 11:13-16. List all the ways you can find that these Hall of Famers demonstrated their faith.

Many of God's promises will not be completely fulfilled in this physical life. The full scope of blessings that accompany our salvation will be realized when Jesus returns to claim the church. We need to keep an eternal perspective, remembering that this world is not our ultimate home. This kind of focus will fill us with an eager anticipation of God's eternal promises!

Use the information in Hebrews 11:4-38 to fill out the table below. Keep in mind that each example may not exactly fit the pattern of the table so you may have a few blank squares.

Biblical Character	Faith Challenge	Faith Response	God's activity or the result of acting in faith
Abel (4-6)			
Enoch (5-6)			
Noah (7)			
Abraham (8-12, 17-19)			
Isaac (20)			
Jacob (21)			
Joseph (22)			
Moses' parents (23)			
Moses (24-28)			
Israel (29-30)			
Rahab (31)			
Misc. & unnamed people (32-38)			

Note: For an extra challenge, and if you have time, find and read the original account of each event in the Old Testament. Write the OT passage under the person's name in the far left column and then add any additional information you discover to the table.

The lives of these people span centuries of time. Their life circumstances are unique. Different challenges called for different responses. Like Abraham, some had to wait patiently on God. Others, like Rahab, had to act swiftly in obedience. In some instances, like Israel at the Red Sea, we see God's immediate and dramatic physical salvation. In other situations – like those stoned, sawed in two, and put to death by the sword – the ultimate fulfillment of God's promises were experienced in eternity.

Even though the circumstances vary, these heroes of the faith share some common characteristics. List those you discovered in the passage.

Treasures in Heaven

These Old Testament believers were not perfect people. For instance, Gideon hesitated to obey and both Samson and David allowed lust to lead them astray. But they all had a faith stronger than death. They looked beyond this physical life to the complete fulfillment of God's promises. Their faith was not simply religion, but rather a relationship of deep trust in God no matter the outcome. They spent their earthly life investing in their eternal future.

Read Matthew 6:19-21. Write the spiritual truths found in this passage in your own words.

How would embracing this kind of eternal focus impact your life?

Read Hebrews 11:39-40.

What promise had these OT hall of famers not yet received when they died?

_____ ***God did not strengthen them through difficulty***

_____ ***They did not get to go to heaven***

_____ ***They died before they saw the fulfillment of God's salvation through Christ***

God brought these mighty people of faith through difficult times and right into His eternal presence. However, all of them died before God's anointed Savior was born. They were saved the same way we are today, but they looked *forward* to God's promised Messiah while we look *back*. (See 11:13.)

This account of great faith is inspiring but, incomplete. The author recognizes that God's family consists of all believers from all time. "God had planned something better for us so that only *together with us* would they be made perfect" (vs. 40). The word "perfect" is translated from the Greek word *teleioō*. It means to make complete; to carry through completely, to accomplish, finish; to bring to the end goal.

Salvation is relational. When we are saved we not only enter into a relationship with God, we also enter into a relationship with all other believers. The faithful ones of the Old Testament had not been "made perfect" because the New Testament believers had not yet entered God's family. And God's family was still not "perfect" until believers today were added. We are one family with the mighty men and women of faith recorded in Hebrews chapter 11.

As this lesson comes to a close, spend some time in prayer and reflection. Consider the following:

- ***If an account was written about your life of faith would it inspire future believers to stand firm?***
- ***In what ways does your faith today encourage your family?***
- ***Others believers?***
- ***Are their areas God wants to strengthen? If so, what are they?***

