

**Old Testament Examples of Saving Faith  
Hebrews 11:1-7**

Everybody in this world operates by faith on some level. For instance, each one of us this morning exercised faith when we came into this room and chose to sit down on a chair. Why did we sit on a chair? We sat on a chair not only because we believed that there was a chair and it could in fact hold us up, but we also sat on the chair because we were willing to entrust ourselves to the chair. All of these components are necessary components of faith.

But if you don't believe me let me ask you this question. Could we have exercised faith in the chair that we sat on this morning if we did not know that there was a chair or if we did not believe in the integrity of the chair or if we had not entrusted ourselves to the chair? No! We could not have exercised faith.

In order for faith to be exercised we must have knowledge, belief and trust. All three of these elements are necessary in order to exercise faith.

So when faith is exercised in something or someone will our lives change? Yes! When we sat on the chair this morning, by faith, was our life changed? Yes!

What we choose to exercise faith in, will always change our lives. Will our lives always change for the better? No! Not necessarily. If we are going to exercise faith we must be extremely careful about who or what we choose to exercise faith in.

But having said this, let me now share with a personal testimonial. Of all the things that I have exercised faith in over the course of my life, there is nothing that has so positively changed my life and has opened my life up to greater blessing, both in terms of time and eternity, than when I chose to exercise faith in God and His word.

And this is certainly not unique to me. Every person who has ever truly exercised faith in God and His word, I believe would say the same thing that I just said.

For when any person exercises this kind of faith or in other words the kind of faith that would lead them to entrust themselves to God and to His word, will from that day forward be able to see things with their spiritual eyes that they were never able to see before; marvelous things, glorious things, that will forever change their lives for the better, both in time and eternity.

And hopefully this will come alive for us this morning, as we once again return to our study of the Book of Hebrews. **And what have we learned so far about this particular book?**

This is what we have learned. We have learned that this book was written to a group of Hebrew believers, living in Rome, who under a great persecution were actually considering turning their backs on Christ and the gospel of Christ, in order to return back to Judaism or to some form of it, knowing that if they did so, that they would no longer have to continue to suffer in the ways that they were presently suffering.

So how did the author respond to this threat in the Book of Hebrews? He emphasized the superiority of Christ, hoping that in doing so, that his readers would be able to see the foolishness of what they were considering.

So what superiorities did this author specifically emphasize? He emphasized the superiority of Christ to prophets. He emphasized the superiority of Christ to Moses. He emphasized the superiority of Christ to angels. And finally he emphasized the superiority of Christ's priesthood and sacrifice over every other priesthood and sacrifice. These are the specific superiorities that this author emphasized in **Hebrews 1:1-10:18**.

So what did the author do after this? The author, based on these superiorities, then strung together three different exhortations in **Hebrews 10:19-25**. So then what did the author do?

The author, again based on those same superiorities, then warned his readers in **Hebrews 10:26-31** against the sin of apostasy. And then what did the author do?

The author then in **Hebrews 10:32-39** encouraged his readers to change their focus from their present sufferings to their future hope that they had in

Christ, as a further means to help them to persevere and not fall away from Christ.

And did he indicate in those verses that he was optimistic about them being able to do this? Yes! Let me read **verse 39**, "**But we (in other words "both you and I") are not of those who shrink back to destruction but of those who have faith to the preservation of the soul.**" He was very optimistic and why was he so very optimistic? He was optimistic because he believed that they had faith.

## MESSAGE

And this is where we left off. So what did the author do next? After confidently stating that he believed that his readers had faith the author then, using Old Testament examples, **challenged** his readers to continue to walk by faith (Hebrews 11:1-40).

So why did he feel that his readers needed to be challenged in this way? This is why: Though he indeed had expressed confidence that they did in fact have faith or, in other words, did in fact have that kind of faith that would endure to the preservation of their soul as he stated at the end of **verse 39**, he still didn't want to take anything for granted. And this is why this author, using Old Testament examples of faith, continued to challenge his readers.

So hopefully, as we consider these various Old Testament examples of faith that this author presented to his readers here in **Hebrews 11**, we will also like his readers, find ourselves challenged to examine our own faith and the genuineness of it. However, before this author began to introduce various Old Testament examples of faith to his readers he first of all presented to them a **working** definition of biblical faith (Hebrews 11:1-3).

So let me now read for you **Hebrews 11:1** and see if this is not so. And this is what it says, "**Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.**"

So do we see a definition of biblical faith in this verse? Yes, we do. But it is not a theological definition of biblical faith. It is rather only a working definition of biblical faith. So what is a working definition of biblical faith?

A working definition of biblical faith is not a complete definition but rather a definition that is good enough to make the point that is needed.

So what was the point that this author was seeking to make when he defined biblical faith as he did in **Hebrews 11:1**?

When the author defined biblical faith as he did in Hebrews 11:1, he was making the point that the only way that anyone can entrust themselves to God and His word is through **faith**.

So how did this author establish this particular point in the working definition that he supplied his readers in **verse 1**?

Let us now look at the very first phrase of **verse 1**. And what does it say? It says this, "**Faith is the assurance of things hoped for.**" So what does this mean? It means this:

Faith when combined with a promise from God provides those who have faith "the **assurance**" (HYPOSTASIS) that what is being hoped for in respect to what has been promised is "real" or substantive".

And this is what makes it possible for us to entrust ourselves to God's word. It is because when we read God's word it makes God's word real and substantive. Or in other words it makes the word come alive to us.

So what else do we learn about faith in **Hebrews 11:1**? Let us now go back to **verse 1** and read it again. And what does it say? It says this: "**Faith is the assurance of things hoped for and the conviction of things not seen.**" So what does this mean? It means this:

Faith when combined with God's promises also provides those who have faith "the **conviction**" (ELENCHOS) or in other words "the proof" for the existence of what is as yet unseen but promised.

So what was the point of this working definition of faith? This was the point: The only way for any person to entrust themselves to God and His word in matters of things related to things unseen, as well as hoped for, is through this kind of faith that he had just defined.

So where does this kind of faith come from? Do we generate it? Do we produce it? No! What good thing can we produce? So where does this kind of faith come from? It is a gift from God (Ephesians 2:8-9).

So what did the author do after he provided his readers with this working definition of biblical faith? He then went on in **verse 2** to make the point that it was through this kind of faith, this enduring kind of faith that is characterized by "assurance" and "conviction," that Old Testament saints gained divine approval.

Isn't this exactly what the author said in **verse 2? "For by it (or other by this kind of faith, this enduring kind of faith that had just been described in verse 1) the men of old (or in other words various Old Testament saints) gained approval."**

So we might think at this point that this author would have immediately begun to provide for his readers examples of faith from the Old Testament that had gained God's approval but he didn't. So what did he do?

Let me now read for **verse 3, "By faith we understand that the worlds were prepared by the word of God, so that what is seen was not made out of things which are visible."** So rather than initially providing examples of the kind of faith that he had just defined from the Old Testament, he brought forth an example of this kind of faith from their own lives.

And what was that example? Their faith in the biblical account of creation was that example. These readers were not present when God created but even though they were not present, the biblical account of creation became real to them and proven to them when the faith that God had given to them was combined with the biblical account of creation.

But why did the author provide this particular example of their faith? This example provided a link between the faith that he believed they had, as indicated in **Hebrews 10:39**, and the faith that he believed that certain Old Testament saints had and demonstrated very dramatically throughout the Old Testament. He will begin to highlight certain Old Testament examples in **Hebrews 11:4-40**.

So who were these Old Testament examples of faith that this author chose to highlight? First of all...

The author chose to highlight certain Old Testament examples of faith that preceded the flood (Hebrews 10:4-7). So who was the first of these Old Testament examples that preceded the flood?

The first Old Testament example of faith that preceded the flood that the author chose to highlight was **Abel** (Hebrews 10:4 cf. Genesis 4:1-15).

So let me now read for you **Hebrews 10:4** and see if this is not so. And what did he say, "**By faith Abel offered to God a better sacrifice than Cain, through which he obtained the testimony that he was righteous, God testifying about his gifts and through faith, though he is dead, he still speaks.**" So was Abel this author's first example of faith that he chose to highlight? Yes.

So what was the background for the verse that we just read? The background for this verse can be found in **Genesis 4:1-15**. So based on this background what happened? Cain and Able both had been asked by God in some form or fashion to bring a sacrifice to Him. Able, a keeper of flocks offered to God a lamb, a very nice lamb. And Cain, a tiller of the fields, offered to God some produce, most likely some very nice produce. But then what happened?

In **Genesis 4:4**, it said that God had regard for Abel's sacrifice but had no regard for Cain's sacrifice. And what did this lead to? Cain killed Abel! Amazing!

So what started all of this? Let me read for you the very first words of **Hebrews 11:4**, "**By faith Abel offered up to God a better sacrifice than Cain...**"

God in some form or fashion had asked both Cain and Abel to bring a sacrifice to Him. And how did they respond? Abel gave Him, as an expression of his faith, exactly what God had wanted and Cain did not. This is why God had regard for Abel's sacrifice and not for Cain's. And what happened as a result of this?

Now the answer to this question is very important. The result of Abel's faith on a physical level was his murder but on spiritual level what was the result of Abel's faith? Let me now go back to **Hebrews 11:4** and continue to read. And what does it say? It says this, **"... through which he (Abel) obtained the testimony that he was righteous, God testifying to his gifts..."**

Because of Abel's faith in God and His word, though he may have died physically, he did not die spiritually. For God declared him to be righteous based on those gifts or in other words those sacrifices that Abel had brought to God as an expression of his faith, most likely not including just his last sacrifice, but also all of his other sacrifices he had brought to God before that.

But this is not all that God did for Abel. Let us to continue to read **Hebrews 11:4** **"... and though he is dead (referring to Abel) he still speaks.**

So how is this possible? It is possible because though Abel died physically, as a result of His faith, he also came alive spiritually as a result of his faith. And because of this, what is he now doing? He is now speaking to us about faith and the benefits of faith, not only in Genesis 4:1-15 but also here in Hebrews 11:4. **SO AFTER THIS FIRST EXAMPLE OF FAITH AND HOW GOD REWARDED THAT FIRST EXAMPLE OF FAITH WHAT IS THE NEXT OLD TESTAMENT EXAMPLE OF FAITH?**

The second Old Testament example of faith that preceded the flood that the author chose to highlight was **Enoch** (Hebrews 11:5-6 cf. Genesis 5:21-24).

So now let me read for you **Hebrews 11:5** and see if this is not so. And what does it say? It says this, **"By faith Enoch was taken up so that he would not see death; and he was not found because God took him up; for he**

**obtained the witness that before his being taken up he was pleasing to God."** So was Enoch this author's second O.T example of faith? Yes!

So what was the background for this verse? The background for this verse can be found in **Genesis 5:21-24**. And what do we learn from these verses? This is what we learn. Enoch, the son of Jared, and the father of Methuselah lived a total of 365 years and during those 365 years he walked with God. And after he completed those 365 years of walking with God, what did these verses say? Did they say, "He died?" No, they said, **"he was not, for God took him."**

And what did this phrase **"he was not, for God took him"** mean? The author of Hebrews explained this phrase in **Hebrews 11:5**. Enoch **"was not"** because he was **"taken up"** to heaven by God. And then what did the author of Hebrews go on to say about why God did this? This is what he said, **"so that he would not see death."** And why did Enoch get blessed with this particular blessing according to this author? This is what the author went on to say in **verse 5**, **"for he obtained the witness that before his being taken up he was pleasing to God"** or in other words this author in effect said, **"Enoch brought pleasure to God."** And how did he bring pleasure to God? He brought pleasure to God **"by faith"** or in other words by trusting in God and His word for 365 years.

So after sharing this second example of faith and how God had rewarded this second of faith, what did the author do next? The author then shared a truth that was related to both of these earlier examples of faith.

And what was this truth? Let me now read for you **Hebrews 11:6**, **"And without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him."**

The author here is, first of all, reminded his readers of the necessity of faith. He told them, **"without faith it is impossible to please Him."** In other words it is impossible for any person to have a relationship with God apart from faith. This is how God designed it to be and this is the way it is.

But who and what are we to have faith in? Look at the next phrase, **"For he who comes to God must believe that He is and that He is the rewarder**

**of those who diligently seek Him."** Our faith is to be in God and in the fact that He will reward us if we continue by faith to seek Him diligently!

So did both Abel and Enoch believe there is a God? Yes! Did they both believe that if they diligently sought after Him that He would reward them? Yes! Have they been rewarded? Yes! Were they rewarded with physical life? No! They were rewarded with spiritual life and the blessings of that life both in time and eternity.

So after this brief statement of fact in **Hebrews 11:6** what did the author do next? He then highlighted his third example.

The third Old Testament example of faith that preceded the flood that the author chose to highlight was **Noah** (Hebrews 11:7 cf. Genesis 6:1-9:17).

So now let me read **Hebrews 11:7**, "**By faith Noah, being warned by God about things not yet seen, in reverence prepared an ark for the salvation of his household, by which he condemned the world, and became an heir of the righteousness which is according to faith.**" So was Noah this author's third example of faith? Yes!

So where do we find the background for this example of faith. We find the background for this example of faith in **Genesis 6:1-9:17**.

Based on these, the world was full of evil and so much so that God was going to destroy the world "**but God found Noah was described as righteous man who had found favor in God's sight.**" So what was Noah able to find favor with God? By faith! This is how he found favor with God. He throughout his life had chosen to walk by faith.

And what was Noah's greatest manifestation of faith? When God called him to build an ark in preparation for a flood that God told him would destroy the world in an act of judgment for the sin that was rampant throughout the world.

So what did Noah do? He set to work on the ark. And how long did it take him? When Noah was first mentioned in **Genesis 5:32** he was 500 years old and according to **Genesis 7:11** he entered the ark when he was 600. So at the very most the longest it could have taken him was 100 years.

So would this have been a challenge to his faith? Absolutely! Year after year he expended himself. Year after year he was very likely ridiculed even though this was not specifically stated. But the worst of all is that year after year, based on **Genesis 2:5-6, there was no rain.** And yet Noah labored on by faith, for he believed God and His word.

And was Noah rewarded for his faith as he **"in reverence prepared an ark for the salvation of his household ..."**? Yes! So how was he rewarded?

First of all God rewarded Noah by using him to prophetically condemn the world through his building of the ark. Where do we find this thought? We find it in the very next phrase, **"by which he (or in other words Noah) condemned the world."** This means that every day when Noah was building the ark he was prophetically speaking of that future day when God is shutting up the door of the ark and would condemn the world.

But even more importantly Noah was rewarded in another way. So let us continue to read the verse, **"and became an heir of the righteousness which is according to faith."** And what does this mean?

It means that God rewarded Noah's faith with the same gift of righteousness he had provided Able and Enoch in response to their faith in Him and His word, which made it possible for them to know God and to enjoy communion with God both in time and eternity.

## CONCLUSION

May God grant us **faith** to continuously trust Him and His word knowing that in doing that He will reward us with spiritual blessings both in this life and the life to come.