

The Book to the Hebrews

Remember:

The purpose of the book is to encourage despondent, weak believers suffering ostracism and denunciation from the Jewish communities, not to drift away from all that they gained in Christ. Or, to get over the “blues” look up to what Christ in His love provided for you!! The Old Testament saint had to long from a shadowed distance and wait for what you and I have been given.

I. The Argument of the Book: The Pre-eminence of Christ in His Person and Work, 1:1-10:18

A. The Superiority of Son to the Angels. 1:1-14, 2:5-18

Parenthesis I: Warning against drifting, 2:1-4

(The path to glory is the way of suffering.)

B. The Superiority of Christ to Moses, 3:1-6

Parenthesis II: Warning against Doubting, 3:7-4:13

(The path to rest is the way of trusting.)

C. The Superiority of Christ to the Aaronic Priesthood, 4:14-10:18

1. Superior because of a better position, vv. 14-16

2. Superior because of better qualifications, 5:1-10

Parenthesis III: Warning against immaturity, 5:11-6:20

(The path to growth is the way of obedience.)

3. Superior because of a better order, 7:1-28

4. Superior because of a better covenant, 8:1-13

5. Superior because of a better sanctuary, 9:1-28

6. Superior because of a better sacrifice, 10:1-18

Parenthesis IV: The Warning against Rejection, 10:19-39

(The path to reward is the way of endurance)

II. The Application: The Implication of the Pre-eminence of Christ because of

A. An Exhortation to Faith: Illustrated, 11:1-40

Beginning here, the writer illustrates the need for faith and endurance, the exhortations of 10:22-24, by rehearsing Old Testament history. It is composed of a series of examples of how faith endures through hope in God. The word “faith” occurs twenty-four times.

The point of this rather wonderful chapter, the great faith chapter in the Bible, is this: if those upon whom the life of the gospel of God's divine

grace was shown but in shadows (that they had not experienced the surpassing greatness of the revelation of God in Christ), yet willing to bear pain, sorrow, and privation trusting in the promises of God to them of something better than mere material benefits, though they did not become beneficiaries of those promises while they lived (though they acted as though they possessed them), how much more should we believe, trust, and obey God's instruction who have become the recipients of far greater revelations of grace than they.

1. The essence of faith stated, vv. 1-3

The writer begins by stating three essential realities concerning faith from a practical perspective.

a. The nature of faith, v. 1

Faith is trust in the integrity, power, and willingness of one who has made promises to fulfill them. Here the emphasis on faith is from our perspective, the subjective experience of faith. The practical fruit of faith is conviction and assurance, though temporally unfulfilled. In the context of the book, the issue is trusting, not abandoning God, in trying circumstances.

b. The result of faith, v. 2

Trust, even in trying times and experiences, is to live in ways that honors God. Our Lord delights in our trust of Him. "Men of old" refers to Old Testament saints out of which the writer will subsequently cite numerous examples.

c. The insight of faith, v. 3

A fundamental for all of us is that a causeless effect is an impossibility. The grandeur of creation witnesses to the excellency, creative efficacy, and the power of one who is uncaused. Faith has spiritual eyes that discerns the realities of the unseen.

The "we" in a reference to the immediate, believing community, the audience of the writing. What they believe about the reality of the unseen should extend to their immediate difficulties; unbelief is their problem.

2. The efficacy of faith: illustrated, vv. 4-40

a. Faith in the pre-patriarchal period, vv.4-7

1) Abel (a proper sacrifice [Gen. 4]), v. 4

Abel is portrayed as a righteous man because he acted in faith as evidenced by his obedience to the instructions of God. What made Abel's sacrifice superior to Cain's was that he acted in the obedience of faith. His obedience was to death, something the recipients had not endured in their gathering!

- 2) Enoch (avoided death [Gen. 5]), v. 5
Enoch's faith brought an unusual blessing (literally the verb means "to convey to another place").
- 3) The writer's editorial comment, v. 6
All the examples in this chapter believed two important things: the existence of God and the goodness of God. Unbelief, often caused by our encounter with difficulties, is rooted in doubt of some attribute of God among Christ-followers.
- 4) Noah (built the Ark [Gen. 6-8]), v. 7
- b. Faith in the patriarchal period, vv. 8-22
 - 1) Abraham and Sarah's sojourn, vv. 8-16
 - a) The promise of a land (Gen. 12:4), vv. 8-10
 - b) The promise of a son by Sarah (Gen. 17), vv. 11-12
 - c) The conclusion, vv. 13-16
Faith trusts when the promise is not seen because of the character and power of the one who promised. As relates to "a city whose builder and maker is God," all the patriarchs died without this promise having been fulfilled. All that Abraham possessed in the land promised to him was a cave in a field that he had purchased from the Hittites. See John 8:56 (Abraham believed in the unfulfilled promises of God).
 - 2) Abraham's "sacrifice (Gen. 22)," vv. 17-19
 - a. Abraham's obedience, vv. 17-18
 - b. Abraham's faith, v. 19
If Abraham believed, as he surely did, that he had a command to fulfill and he also had a promise that through his son the promise would continue, then he believed that life would spring from death.
 - 3) Isaac (Gen. 27), v. 20
Isaac blessed both of his sons with promises of the future.
 - 4) Jacob (Gen. 48, 49), v. 21
Jacob did the same in faith for Joseph's sons, as well as his own.
 - 5) Joseph (Gen. 50), v. 22
At death Joseph expressed faith in the promises of a land for his people and the exodus from Egypt expressed in the location of the internment of his embalmed body.
- c. Faith in the era of the birth of the nation, vv. 23-31
 - 1) Moses' parent's, vv. 23
 - a) The fact of their action, v. 23a
When Moses was born to Amram (Exod. 6:20) and Jochebed (Levites of the clan of Kohath), the times were harsh as the Egyptians imposed an ethnic cleansing program to end the

threat of the growing foreign, Semite peoples by destroying males at birth (girls would later marry Egyptians and the Semites would blur into Egyptian culture within a generation [Exod. 1:8-22]).

b) The reasons for their action, v. 23b

Though the couple apparently did not name their son, they saw in his countenance something in his character and deduced the favor of God of his life (the word used here is used of God's delight in the creation ["He saw that it was good," Gen. 1:10, 12]). They obeyed the order to put the male into the river but did so in a different way. There, Hatshepsut, Amenhotep II's daughter, found him, adopted him, and named him after her grandfather, Thutmose III. Moses means "drawn out;" Thutmose means "born of a god," a claim to deity.

Further, their trust in God with the sense of His directive mercies was greater than their fear of a monarch. They got their son back in a shocking manner!

2) Moses, vv. 24-29

a) Moses in Pharaoh's court, vv. 24-26

Moses was educated in the court of Pharaoh as Hatshepsut's "son;" he was educated to assume the highest office in the land. It consumed the initial forty years of his life (Acts 7:21-23).

(1) The actions of Moses, v. 24

Moses rejected Egyptian status and privilege to identify with a race condemned to oblivion.

(2) The motives of Moses, vv. 25-26

(a) Stated, v. 25

Moses had a sense that the joys of Egyptian status were as a fleeting shadow.

(b) Interpreted, v. 26

What an insight! Moses looked forward through the shadows imposed by distance, seeing the meaning of what is real from afar rather than in his immediate surroundings. The writer clarifies what Moses saw more clearly than Moses did and that he followed a course of action commended to us.

b) Moses and the flight to Midian, v. 27

The incident that brought the crisis was the killing of an Egyptian who was beating a Hebrew (Exod. 4: 11-15). Stephen tells us that Moses was making a claim to be a deliverer, but

the people rejected him (Acts 7:25-29). Our text tells us that Moses did not fear his stepfather. Sadly, the Hebrews went without a deliverer for another forty years.

Though it was vague, Moses had a sense that Egypt's glory was temporal and the destiny of the Hebrews held great promise.

c) Moses and the Passover, v. 28

On the night of Israel's deliverance, Moses had the people observe the Passover, a hurried meal with the sprinkling of blood on the doorposts and lintels of their homes (Exod. 12: 7,13). Israel was redeemed in the shedding of blood that protected them. "... when He sees the blood...the Lord will pass over the door (Exod. 12:23). As the Egyptians wept over the consequences of the tenth plague, a nation is born (the phrase, "congregation of Israel," appears for the first time [Exod. 12:3]). In faith, Moses responded in obedience to God's instructions.

d) Moses and the Exodus, v. 29

The redemption of the nation from the land of bondage and servitude through the shedding of blood and the miracle of the parting of the Reed or Red Sea (Exod. 14:1-31) is a picture of our deliverance from bondage through's Jesus' shed blood on our behalf and its application in the miracle of our rebirth through faith. By faith Moses lifted his hands and the miracle happened.

3) Joshua, v. 30

Marching around an impregnable city (Josh. 6: 1-21) once each day for six days and seven times on the seventh with a culminating shout does not cause earthquakes (in this case the wall fell straight down, not at an angle). By faith Joshua obeyed and saw the consequent victory.

4) Rahab, v. 31

This lady was not only notorious for her profession (thus, it would not be strange to be visited in the night), but also for her faith. She believed that God had given Jericho into the possession of the Hebrews and acted in faith. "I know that the Lord your God has given you the land... (Josh. 2:9)."

The result of her faith was her identification with Israel (Josh. 6:17, 25). She married Salmon and birthed Boaz, David's grandfather (Matt. 1:5).

d. Faith in the experience of the nation, vv. 32-38

The writer summarizes faith as common throughout the nation's history with a broad survey, naming people, yet not specific events.

1) Faith expressed, v. 32

Six people are mentioned as examples of faith, the prophets collectively. Some of these people were also remarkable for their failures of faith. The initial four were local judges in Israel during the time of the Judges (after Joshua, but before Saul); David, the nation's greatest king; and Samuel, a judge that anointed Saul and David. The list is suggestive, not exhaustive.

Gideon won a remarkable victory over the Midianites, Amalekites, and eastern armies with a reduced army, lanterns, and shouts (Jud. 6-7), though he asked for reassurance twice.

Barak won a stunning victory over Sisera's nine hundred iron chariots (Judges 4) though he feared to go to battle without Deborah.

Samson performed amazing feats against the Philistines (Judges 14-16), but his downfall was his passions.

Jephthah won a victory over the Ammonites (Jud. 11) though he associated with an evil crowd, made a foolish vow costing a daughter's life, and warred against his own people because they insulted him.

David was Israel's greatest king (defeated his enemies, escaped Saul, established Jerusalem as his capital, brought the ark of the covenant to the city, and made preparation for the temple), yet he proved to be an adulterer (II Sam. 11), a murderer, and distrusted the Lord in numbering the people (II Sam. 31).

Samuel was a prophet and a judge, though likely a permissive parent (I Sam. 8:3).

And the prophets.

2) Faith delineated, vv. 33-39

a) The mighty deeds of faith, vv. 33-35a

The writer lists ten great acts wrought through faith.

Conquered kingdoms: Joshua, David, and the Judges..

- Administered justice: Samuel, David, and the Judges
- Gained promises: David
- Stopped lions: David, Daniel
- Quenched fire: Shadrach, Meshach, Abednego
- Escaped the sword: Jeremiah, Ezekiel.
- Gained strength in weakness: Samson.
- Became mighty in battle: David, the Judges.
- Put armies to flight: David and the Judges.
- Women received their dead: Woman of Shunem
- b) The mighty submissions in faith, vv. 35b-38
 - The writer again lists ten submissions wrought through faith.
 - Some in faith chose to suffer for a later, greater benefit.

- Death: Zechariah
- Floggings: Jeremiah
- Imprisonment: Micaiah, Jeremiah, Hanani
- Stoned: Jeremiah
- Sawed apart: Isaiah
- Murdered by sword: Uriah, John the Baptist
- Destitute: Elijah, Elisha
- Afflicted:
- Ill-treated:
- Homeless: John the Baptist

Two important things are said of those who in faith endured the unpleasant.

They awaited a better life (v. 35b).

The world is not worthy of them (v. 38a).

- c) The conclusion, vv. 39-40
 - The word “commended” in verses 2 and 39 indicates a single unit, a framing of a concept (a literary device to delineate a unified section, an *inclusio*).
 - 1) Stated, v. 39a
 - Faith, trust in the promises of God, is how we please Him as His followers.
 - 2) Qualified, v. 39b
 - The thing promised was “a land, a seed, and a blessing (Gen. 12:1-3).” The shadow is fulfilled in the promise of heaven, in the redeemer Jesus, and in the gift of eternal life. We have yet to receive the fullness of these things though we have received them.

3) Reasoned, v. 40

The “without us” refers to believers in the New Covenant era in the sense that we received the fulfillment of the promises made to the OT saints in shadowed form. Without the fulfillment of God’s promises that were given to us in the New Covenant, they would still be waiting in “shadowland.”

Thoughts:

1. The point of this chapter is that as the Old Covenant people exhibited a faith that pleased God; we should walk by faith as well. The values of the world are not the values of the walk of faith. The world values the things of the world (comfort, pleasure, power, place); we value the unseen and future. How many of us live by sight rather than by faith?
2. A key to prudent choices in this life is to be found in the realization that this world offers very little that is real or lasting. It offers many good things, but every good is a shadow that points to something enduring other than what it is. This insight should be considered when we think about investment of life and finances. Some people live for the day and when the day ends what they receive for their efforts is only what a day can bring. I hope that is not descriptive of us.
3. Faith does more than obtain benefits; it foregoes benefits, accepts pain and privation. This tells me that the Christian life is not always about testimonies of blessings; it is also a life of conviction, integrity, and endurance that comes at the cost of pain, the foregoing of pleasures, and even the experience of death.
4. I am struck that most of the examples of faith, the way to walk pleasing to God, were also people of great lapses of faith and obedience (disobedience is evidence of disbelief that God’s way and commands are best for us). We should not read of these people and imagine that they lived lives more skillful than we. We are all sinners, we who are people of faith. Perfection is not the avenue to pleasing God; it is trust evidenced by endurance.