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By Dan Maines

Hebrews 11

Hebrews 11:1

Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.

† Faith gives present substance to what is future and unseen. It is not guesswork, it is trust in God's character and word.

† Habakkuk 2:4 anchors this chapter, the righteous will live by faith.

† 1QpHab, the Habakkuk Peshar from Qumran, applies

Habakkuk 2:4 to a faithful remnant who live by trust in God's promises.

† Sirach 44 opens, Let us now praise famous men, linking faith with the deeds of Israel's ancestors, a theme Hebrews gathers into one great line.

Hebrews 11:2

For by it the people of old received their commendation.

† Scripture commended the elders, not for perfect performance, but for persevering trust.

† Clement of Rome, 1 Clement 9, appeals to these same elders as examples for the church.

Hebrews 11:3

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.

† Faith looks behind the visible to the creating word. The unseen is not unreal, it is ultimate.

† Philo, On the Creation 16, speaks of God's Logos ordering what is seen, a Jewish way of saying what Hebrews affirms.

Hebrews 11:4

By faith Abel offered to God a better sacrifice than Cain, through which he was approved as righteous, God testifying to his gifts, and through faith, though dead, he still speaks.

† Abel's offering showed a heart of trust. His testimony continues, righteousness is by faith, not by form alone.

† 1 Clement 4 recalls Abel as the first righteous martyr, whose faith still speaks.

Hebrews 11:5-6

By faith Enoch was taken so that he would not see death, and he was not found because God took him, for he obtained the

witness that before his taking he was pleasing to God. And without faith it is impossible to please Him, for the one who comes to God must believe that He exists and that He rewards those who seek Him.

† Enoch's translation shows faith's reward, life in God's presence. Seeking God in trust is the only path that pleases Him.

† Jewish tradition held Enoch up as a model of walking with God, see Sirach 44:16.

Hebrews 11:7

By faith Noah, being warned about things not yet seen, in reverent fear prepared an ark for the salvation of his household, by which he condemned the world and became an heir of the righteousness that is according to faith.

† Noah believed God about future judgment, so his obedience proved his faith.

† Josephus, Antiquities 1.3.1, recounts Noah's trust and obedience as the ground of his deliverance.

Hebrews 11:8-10

By faith Abraham, when he was called, obeyed by going out to a place he was to receive for an inheritance, and he went out not knowing where he was going. By faith he lived as a stranger in the land of promise, dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob, heirs with him of the same promise, for he was looking for the city that has foundations, whose architect and builder is God.

† Faith goes without full maps, trusting the Caller. Abraham lived as a pilgrim because his eyes were set on God's built city.

† Philo, On Abraham 70, praises Abraham's readiness to leave homeland for God's call.

† Josephus, Antiquities 1.7.1, highlights Abraham's departure by trust rather than sight.

Hebrews 11:11-12

By faith even Sarah herself received power to conceive, even beyond the proper time of life, since she considered Him faithful who had promised. Therefore there was born of one man, and him as good as dead, descendants as many as the stars of heaven and as innumerable as the sand by the seashore.

† Sarah's faith focused on the Promiser, not on her age. The promise created a people where there was no human power left.

† Mishnah Avot 5:3 remembers Abraham's ten trials, which included trust in God's promise concerning offspring.

Hebrews 11:13-16

All these died in faith, not having received the promises, but seeing them and welcoming them from a distance, and confessing that they were strangers and exiles on the earth. For those who say such things make it clear that they are seeking a country of their own. If they had been remembering that land from which they went out, they would have had opportunity to return. But as it is, they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one.

† Faith lives as an exile, eyes fixed on the better country. The patriarchs did not turn back, they looked ahead to God's city.

† Wisdom of Solomon 10 celebrates how Wisdom led the patriarchs as sojourners, a theme Hebrews applies to faith.

Hebrews 11:17-19

By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac, and he who had received the promises was offering up his only son, of whom it was said, In Isaac your descendants shall be called. He considered that God is able to raise people even from the dead, from which, figuratively speaking, he also received him back.

† Faith trusts God with the promise itself. Abraham reasoned that God could raise the dead, so he placed the promise on the

altar.

† Philo, On Abraham 167, notes Abraham's logic of trust, that God's promise could not fail even when Isaac lay on the altar.

† Josephus, Antiquities 1.13.3, recounts Abraham's trial as the peak display of faith.

Hebrews 11:20-22

By faith Isaac blessed Jacob and Esau concerning things to come. By faith Jacob, when dying, blessed each of Joseph's sons and worshiped, leaning on the top of his staff. By faith Joseph, when dying, made mention of the exodus of the sons of Israel and gave orders concerning his bones.

† Faith speaks blessings into the future because it trusts God's word beyond present sight.

† Joseph's orders about his bones show confidence that God would bring Israel out, see Genesis 50, also Josephus, Antiquities 2.8.2.

Hebrews 11:23-26

By faith Moses, when he was born, was hidden by his parents for three months, because they saw he was a beautiful child, and they were not afraid of the king's edict. By faith Moses, when he had grown up, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, choosing rather to be mistreated with the people of God than to enjoy the temporary pleasures of sin, considering the reproach of the Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt, for he was looking to the reward.

† Faith fears God more than any king. Moses chose suffering with God's people rather than ease without God.

† Philo, Life of Moses 1.5, describes Moses rejecting Egyptian honors for the sake of virtue and piety.

† Josephus, Antiquities 2.9.6, recounts Moses' decision to align with his people, a faith choice with real cost.

Hebrews 11:27-28

By faith he left Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king, for he endured as seeing Him who is unseen. By faith he kept the Passover and the sprinkling of the blood, so that the destroyer would not touch their firstborn.

† Faith endures by seeing the Invisible. The Passover blood prefigured Christ, deliverance by substitution and promise.

† Wisdom of Solomon 18:21 celebrates the power of God's appointed sign to shield the people, a parallel to Hebrews' point.

Hebrews 11:29-31

By faith they passed through the Red Sea as through dry land, and the Egyptians, when they attempted it, were drowned. By faith the walls of Jericho fell after they had been encircled for seven days. By faith Rahab the harlot did not perish with those who were disobedient, after she had welcomed the spies in peace.

† Faith obeys instructions that look strange to the world. God toppled walls and opened seas when His people trusted and walked.

† Josephus, Antiquities 5.1.2, records Jericho's fall and Rahab's preservation, noting her reception of the spies.

† 1 Clement 12 praises Rahab's faith as a model for the church.

Hebrews 11:32-35a

And what more shall I say, for time would fail me if I tell of Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, David and Samuel and the prophets, who by faith conquered kingdoms, performed acts of righteousness, obtained promises, shut the mouths of lions, quenched the power of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, were made strong from weakness, became mighty in war, put foreign armies to flight. Women received back their dead by resurrection.

† Israel's history shows victory by faith, not by numbers or strength. Lions, flames, swords, none could stop a people who trusted God.

† Sirach 46 to 48 surveys judges, kings, and prophets in similar fashion, highlighting faith that acts.

Hebrews 11:35b-38

Others were tortured, not accepting release, so that they might obtain a better resurrection. Others experienced mocking and flogging, chains and imprisonment, they were stoned, they were sawn in two, they were tempted, they were put to death with the sword, they went about in sheepskins and goatskins, destitute, afflicted, ill treated, the world was not worthy of them, wandering in deserts and mountains and caves and holes in the ground.

† Faith also suffers. Refusing easy release, the faithful chose a better resurrection.

† 2 Maccabees 6 to 7 records Eleazar and the seven brothers who accepted torture rather than deny the Law, a clear background to Hebrews' line.

† 4 Maccabees 9 to 18 reflects on those same martyrs, praising their endurance.

† The tradition that Isaiah was sawn in two appears in the Ascension of Isaiah 5, a likely allusion behind this verse.

† 1 Maccabees 2:28, 2:29 shows faithful ones fleeing to the wilderness, matching Hebrews' picture of exiles and caves.

Hebrews 11:39-40

And all these, having gained approval through their faith, did not receive what was promised, because God had provided something better for us, so that apart from us they would not be made perfect.

† The story finds its goal with the new covenant people. The elders waited for the better thing God would complete in Christ. Their perfection arrived with the fulfillment in the first century,

when the old order gave way to the kingdom established by the Son.

† Eusebius, Ecclesiastical History 3.7, connects the end of the old order with the rise of the new, clarifying how the promise reached its goal together with us.

Application for us today

† Faith is not vague optimism, it is concrete trust in God's finished work in Christ.

† Faith obeys even when directions look strange, it walks around Jericho, it builds an ark before rain, it leaves home with no map.

† Faith endures when suffering arrives, it values reproach with Christ above the treasures of Egypt, it refuses release that costs fidelity.

† Faith looks for God's city, not for a revival of the old covenant. The elders aimed beyond land and temple, and so do we.

† Faith now lives in the reality those elders awaited. Christ has brought the better covenant, the better country, and the opened way. Hold fast to that confession.

† This is the fulfilled perspective we proclaim at Fulfilled Prophecies †

Source Index

† Genesis 4, 5, 6 to 9, 12 to 22, 49 to 50, Exodus 1 to 14, Joshua 2 and 6

† Habakkuk 2:4, the righteous live by faith

† Sirach 44 to 50, praise of the ancestors

† Wisdom of Solomon 10 and 18, Wisdom guides the patriarchs, the protecting sign

† 1 Maccabees 2:28 to 29, faithful flee to the wilderness

† 2 Maccabees 6 to 7, Eleazar and the seven brothers

† 4 Maccabees 9 to 18, endurance of the martyrs

† Ascension of Isaiah 5, tradition of Isaiah sawn in two

† 1QpHab, Habakkuk Peshar, the righteous live by faith

† Philo, On the Creation 16, God's Logos orders what is seen
† Philo, On Abraham 70 and 167, Abraham's departure and trial
† Philo, Life of Moses 1.5, Moses rejects Egyptian honors
† Josephus, Antiquities 1.3.1, 1.7.1, 1.13.3, 2.8.2, 2.9.6, faith of Noah, Abraham, Joseph, Moses
† Josephus, Antiquities 5.1.2, Jericho and Rahab
† Clement of Rome, 1 Clement 4, 9 to 12, Abel, the elders, Rahab
† Eusebius, Ecclesiastical History 3.7, end of the old order and rise of the new

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